



RETURN WITH US
NOW...
RADIO HISTORICAL
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FATHER'S
DAY

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GANG BUSTERS

Radio's Crusade Against Crime

by Martin Grams, Jr.

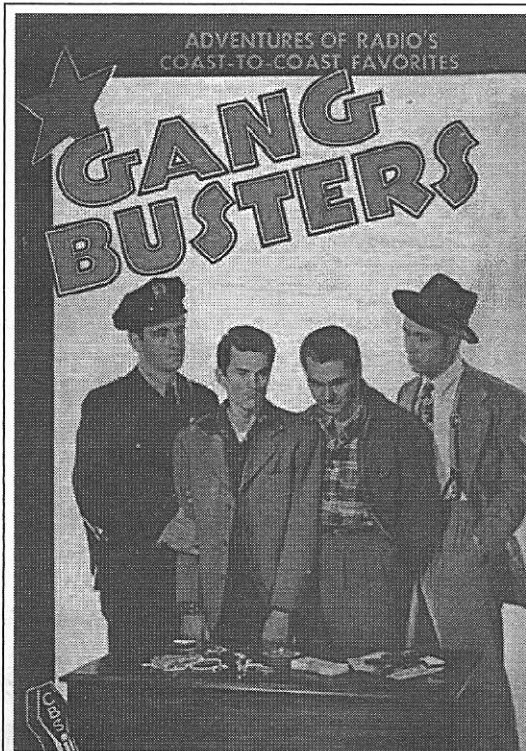
When Phillips H. Lord created GANGBUSTERS in January of 1936, crime was rampant and almost tolerated. Obedience to the law and respect for law-enforcement agencies were at low ebb. Criminals and their workings were highly publicized into glamorous episodes.

Lord, as an amateur criminologist of note and a man who had delved into criminal behavior by inclination was appalled. He had just finished his G-MEN series, which dramatized FBI cases and knew how the criminals lived, what they were like and how they operated. Civic-minded citizens, law officers and police organizations were approached. They were enthusiastic in their approval and unstinting in their cooperation. They turned over their files and Lord made radio history with his exposes.

At first Lord appeared on the program and interviewed the guest police officials. Later, as his other radio programs demanded more attention, he turned the hosting chores over to West Point

graduate, Colonel H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who for twenty years was nationally prominent in police circles. When the Colonel was recalled to active duty, the late Lewis J. Valentine, former Commissioner of Police of the City of New York, took over.

Every GANGBUSTERS broadcast featured nationwide clues, which consisted of last-minute reports of wanted persons, received from the police and FBI. One hundred requests weekly was the average number of police bulletins received by GANGBUSTERS. They were boiled down to one or two clues, selected for importance, color and ease in remembering the descriptions. GANG BUSTERS files show that among those criminals apprehended by such nationwide clues were Lawrence Devol, Hoffman and Penning, Edward (Wilhelm) Bentz, Howard Hayes and Charles Jones, Claude Beaver, and Percy Geary. In addition to those named, by May of 1942, more than 277 other criminals had been apprehended through GANGBUSTERS clues.



Known as the "Number One Idea Man" in radio, Phillips H. Lord was once presented on the floor of Congress as the "source of more enjoyment than any person living today in the (Continued on Page 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

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

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KFKA 1310 AM	"Radio Memories" (Greeley)	Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00 PM
KNUS 710 AM	"Radio Revisited"	Weekdays, 10:00 - 11:00 PM
KRMA TV Channel 6	Secondary Audio Program (SAP), "Tribute to OTR"	Sunday, 2:00 PM
KUVO 89.3 FM	"Destination Freedom"	9:00 PM

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Convention Schedules

REPS Radio Showcase XII, June 24 - 27, 2004 at the Seattle Center, Seattle Washington. Contact Mike Sprague, Box 723, Bothell, WA 98041 (425) 488-9518 hrrmikes@aol.com, also check web site: <http://www.repsonline.org>

28th Old-time Country Music Contest and Festival, Aug 30 - Sep 5, 2004 at Harrison County Fairgrounds in Missouri Valley, Iowa. For information contact Bob Everhart at Box 492, Walnut, IA 51577 (712) 762-4363, bobeverhart@yahoo.com

29th Friends of Old-time Radio Convention, Oct 21 - 24, 2004 at the Holiday Inn, Newark, NJ For information contact Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887, JayHick@aol.com, or check our web site: <http://www.fotr.net>

United States". He conceived the program with the purpose of giving credit to outstanding police work throughout the country and, at the same time, implementing the enforcement of law with real public service features for radio listeners. Mirroring the drama of a lawless era and sounding the tocsin for a crusade against crime, GANGBUSTERS started a completely new trend in radio shows. The depression years accentuated American's awareness of social ills, people began demanding more realism in their entertainment, and GANGBUSTERS filled the bill.

"Besides being an enduring monument to the bare-faced versatility of producer Phillips H. (Seth Parker) Lord, the radio thriller GANG BUSTERS is clearly the big shot rackety rax on the U.S. air," quoted TIME MAGAZINE. The cops-versus-robbers program started with a bang. The brutal realism of the early GANG BUSTERS broadcasts were depicted with criminals who laid low in the shadows, lived a life of ill repute including smoking and drinking, slept with small firearms under their pillows, took pleasure in beating their gun molls, and gave little concern toward the welfare of everyday citizens. Police officers were hailed as heroes when it came to protecting the lives of innocent American citizens, never taking the law into their own hands, following the code of ethics devised under State and Federal laws, and always prevailing against crime, proving week after week that "crime does not pay."

In the broadcast of January 22, 1936 entitled "The End of 'Fats' McCarthy," the opening scene grabbed the attention of listeners not because of the fast-paced action, but because of the heroics of a detective. Three New York policemen followed a suspicious looking man into a rooming house. When they asked someone for additional information, three gangsters opened fire and shot them. An act of heroism was featured during this occurrence. Detective Pessagno carried his partner down several flights of stairs to get him to an ambulance and to a hospital before he was too weak from loss of blood. The strain was too much for Pessagno, who was wounded himself, and he died.

The opening scenes in the broadcast of February 5, 1936 entitled "The Reppin Murder Case," attempted to pluck a heart string with the listeners, giving them an emotional jolt including an explanation of why the week's gangster was important enough to warrant a death sentence if

tracked down and apprehended. A young man, Vincent Regan, working his way through college by driving a taxicab, was found seriously wounded and rushed to the hospital. Just before he was wheeled into the operating room, his mother gave the police inspector permission to question him, hoping Vincent might give a clue to the murderer. Vincent told the following story before he died: A call came into the taxi office for a driver to take a sick man to the hospital. When Vincent arrived at the place designated, a man stepped into the cab and ordered him to drive on. After a while he ordered Vincent to stop and pulled a gun. Taking the four dollars Vincent had, he forced him out of the cab and told him to lie down on the grass. Then he began to beat him up. Vincent fought back. When he knocked one gun out of the killer's hand, the gangster shot him with another one, then drove away in the cab, which he abandoned shortly afterwards.

Unusual police work was often a highlight of the series, where authorities of the common law applied almost any means to acquire the knowledge of criminal action. So long as the methods were within decent, moral standards and the motives were just, the ways of extracting information from criminals were accepted by broadcasting standards and listener approval. In "The Reppin Murder Case," while questioning the captured robber, a prison warden pretends to have incorrect information so that he could trick the convicts into giving him the specific details, which he was looking for. He obtained his information without the convicts even realizing that they had given their partner away.

In "The Case of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker" (February 12 and 19, 1936), police learned of the criminals' plans to drive their car to meet one of their gang members driving in his father's truck in the opposite direction along the highway. Police intercepted the truck, persuaded the father, whose son didn't accompany him, to cooperate, and took the front wheel off the truck, making it appear as though an accident has occurred. The criminals unsuspectingly stopped their car to find out what was wrong with the truck. The police, who had been hiding in the brush, had enough time to surround and shoot them when they refused to surrender. The bodies of the criminals were riddled with bullets (later visually depicted just as brutally in the 1967 film Bonnie and Clyde).

In "The Capture of Leonard Scarnici" (broadcast March 25, 1936), Leonard Scarnici, a racketeer from

Springfield, came to New York to get into the Dutch Schultz Gang as a professional killer. In order to test Scarnici's ability as a killer, and his faithfulness, the Schultz Gang ordered him to kill Wilson, his best friend in Springfield. Scarnici returned to Illinois and asked Wilson to go into the fields with him to dig for something. Scarnici specifically asked that the hole be six feet long and three feet wide. Wilson had complete faith in Scarnici and readily accepted the task. When Wilson completed the digging, Scarnici shot his friend and then buried him alive.

The opening scene in "The Capture of the Dago Peretti Gang" (broadcast April 8, 1936) opened in an old deserted cellar, where Dago Perretti met with his gang. Dago's gang had terrorized Chicago by a series of murders and robberies for over a year. The gang didn't know the identity of Dago, or where he lived, but the members of the gang were in terror of him. Dago has just finished giving them instructions about future hold-up jobs when the only candle lighting the cellar was suddenly blown out. When the candle was lit, Dago was gone and one of the gang who had remarked that he wished he weren't in the gang was found with a knife in his side.

A thrilling tale of juvenile delinquency dramatized on GANGBUSTERS was "The Case of the Missouri Massacre," broadcast September 9, 1936. Harry Young, a crack shot in a sleepy town in the Ozark hills, killed a man in cold blood while under the influence of alcohol. The local sheriff, upon learning the whereabouts of Harry and his brother, gathered a posse of ten men and made for the house. Almost jubilant with the thrill of killing, Harry relentlessly shot at the officers. An excellent marksman, Harry and his brother had little trouble demolishing the entire police staff.

Sometime after the famous Missouri Massacre at the Old Homestead, a citizen went to the local police station to report that he had unknowingly rented a room to the Young brothers. They had given a false name, but that night the landlord saw their pictures in the local paper. In the rented room, the two boys were discussing their mother's plea that they kill themselves, and reflected that there was probably no one in the world who was glad they were alive. Suddenly they saw the cops closing in on them. Harry voted for killing as many as they could, but Jennings convinced him it would do no good. He begged and finally convinced Harry to do the last decent thing they could do kill themselves. Promising each other they would shoot until their

breath was gone, the two brothers stood toe to toe with their guns pressed against each other's heart and blasted each other to bits. When their mother received the news, she reverently said, "I hope they had time to pray for forgiveness before they died."

GANGBUSTERS was like any other radio show, and suffered from many legal complications. Attorneys representing legal council for criminals presently serving prison sentences attempted to prevent their clients' stories from being dramatized. Some succeeded, others lost. An occasional listener would claim they were falsely depicted because of the program's brutal honesty to present the facts as closely as they could, which often resulted in out-of-court settlements and time-wasted disputes. Even crimes of passion, criminals committing crimes while under the influence were considered taboo. (In one case, a criminal dressed in a Santa Claus suit was lynched by a mob in a small ghetto town, and hung to death in the streets - the day after Christmas.)

One such example is "The Case of Martin Durkin," broadcast on August 25, 1937, which caused a storm of legal complications for Phillips H. Lord. The script (the same previously dramatized on the G-MEN radio series two years earlier) involved F.B.I. man Edward B. Shanahan who had been assigned by J. Edgar Hoover to break up a stolen auto racket run by Martin Durkin, a well-known Midwestern operator. Durkin had a quick trigger finger, having wounded three policemen in Chicago, and one in California. Shanahan had canvassed all agencies, garages and repair shops in Chicago where Durkin was believed to be centering his activities, without success. Then he was notified that Durkin had been in a certain garage. Shanahan followed the tip and a group of Chicago police stationed themselves in the garage and waited. After hours passed without success, the police left and promised to send another shift to replace them. Shanahan was alone when Durkin pulled in. He leveled his gun and demanded that Durkin surrender. Pretending to open the door, Durkin reached instead for his gun and shot the G-Man point blank. Then he gunned the car and backed out of the garage, as the dying officer fired shots after him.

From that moment every resource of all the law enforcement agencies in the country was directed at Durkin. The G-Men knew that Durkin's two weaknesses were money and women. They questioned an attractive girlfriend of his, Betty

Werner, who lived with her uncle Lloyd Austin. She said she never heard from him, but later her uncle told the police secretly that Durkin was going to visit her that evening. The police and federal authorities planned a trap for him. Officers were stationed at various points in the house. Sgt. Gray, the ace marksman of the Chicago police was stationed at the back door with a sawed-off shot gun. The suspense was not prolonged. A car stopped at the back gate and Durkin climbed the steps. His girlfriend was about to shout out a warning when Grey stood up and opened fire at Durkin as he reached the top step. The wily Durkin, however, had worn his bulletproof vest, and the shot did no harm. He pulled his gun and shot Sgt. Gray. In the resulting confusion, the girl's uncle was caught in the police crossfire and killed. Durkin made good his escape with only a flesh wound.

After this incident, Hoover told his men that Durkin must be taken at all costs, dead or alive. His description and fingerprints were given the widest description possible. Hoover felt that his need for money would lead him back into the car racket. Durkin had a penchant for stealing expensive Cadillacs, Packards and Pierce Arrows. He would walk into a showroom and demand a certain car to be delivered to him, serviced with gas and oil, the next morning early, for which he would pay cash on delivery. That night he would steal the serviced car and depart. Then he would change the license serial number and sell it in another state.

On January 10, 1926, the Los Angeles office of the F.B.I. was notified that a new phaeton, with brown top, green body and red wooden wheels had been stolen. On Sunday, January 17, a sheriff in the little Texas town of Pecos saw a phaeton parked in front of a store. He looked inside and saw a new .44 Winchester rifle on the floor. When a breezy young man and girl came out of the store he inquired about the rifle. The man claimed to be Fred Conly, deputy sheriff of Los Angeles County, and introduced his "wife." He said they were going hunting and asked the sheriff for some help.

When the Sheriff said he would like to see their identification papers, the couple returned to their hotel to get them and promise to be right back. Naturally, they did not. The rather naïve Sheriff reported the incident to the El Paso office of the F.B.I. The hunt was intensified in the rugged section known as the "Big Bend of the Rio Grande." Two days later they found the car, disabled in a clump of

mesquite. They learned the couple had traveled to Alpine 150 miles to the south by train. In Alpine it was discovered they had taken the Texas Special of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas R.R. to St. Louis at 11 a.m. that day.

On 9:30 a.m. on January 20, 1926, a group of heavily armed agents in civilian clothing met the train at the station before St. Louis. Passengers were alarmed as grim faced men paraded down the length of the third car and pulled guns before a compartment. The passengers were herded out. A G-Man knocked on the door and Durkin answered. They grappled with him and prevented him from reaching his gun. He and his 18-year-old bride of two weeks were captured.

Five days after the GANG BUSTERS presentation of "The Case of Martin Durkin" was broadcast, the following appeared in the August 23, 1937 issue of Time Magazine:

"Every week since January 1936 Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Co. has been advertising Palmolive shaving creams with a Wednesday night coast-to-coast radio melodrama entitled Gang-busters. Produced by smart young Benton & Bowles advertising agency, which claims 20,000,000 listeners for the program, GANG BUSTERS dramatizes actual criminal careers. The killing of Dillinger Gangster Homer Van Meter was the subject of one hair-raising episode. But Gangbusters has not confined itself to dead law-breakers. The dramatization of the capture of Massachusetts' murdering Millen Brothers was broadcast prior to their electrocution and many a live but lesser robber, forger and gangster has had his story told. Until last week there had never been a squawk from the criminal.

"Last week dapper little Martin J. 'Marty' Durkin, known in his gunning heyday as 'The Shiek' and now in his twelfth year of a 35-year term in Joliet (Ill.) Penitentiary for killing a Federal agent in Chicago in 1925, was announced as the principal character in the Gang-busters weekly dramatization. 'They've got no right to use my misfortune to peddle soap,' said Lawyer Irving S. Roth for Convict Durkin, eligible for parole in seven more months. Into court at Chicago marched Mr. Roth, seeking an injunction against the broadcast. Surprised, Benton & Bowles quickly dropped Durkin's tale, instead told one about a rich New Yorker named Shattuck who pursued a thieving butler across the ocean,

caught him in France and had him sent to Devil's Island.

"Everybody knows that no criminal has any legal protection against the publication of the facts of his conviction. Murderer Durkin's chief hope for an injunction was therefore based on an unusual Illinois statute that makes it unlawful to exhibit for pecuniary gain criminal or deformed persons. Federal Judge J. Leroy Adair pondered, decided 'exhibiting' meant displaying the person as on a vaudeville stage, refused the injunction. Benton & Bowles's Manhattan publicity department shot out an exultant news release claiming 'freedom of speech in commercial broadcasting was upheld for the first time in radio history.' Promptly Murderer Durkin's biography was announced for the Gang-busters show this week."

Durkin escaped the chair by convincing a jury that he had thought Shanahan was a hi-jacker. Durkin had indeed gone to court in 1937 to prevent his case from being broadcast, and lost.

Author's note: *This small sample of the book's contents is being submitted with the hope that old-time radio fans and fans of GANG BUSTERS in general will get a deeper understanding that GANG BUSTERS was not just a cops-versus-robbers series. Over 400 pages of this same fascinating material is gleaming for the printers ink and I hope (and please excuse any typos cause it's a quick rough draft I am submitting) that radio fans will appreciate the series for what it accomplished and not the sound effects for which it is probably best remembered today. Radio shows do not get any better.*

The GANGBUSTERS book documents the history of the radio program, a complete episode guide with plots, casts, etc. for every radio and television broadcast. Background production to the performances, various trivia about the shows, the true-life crime representations, and a superb history of the program itself is featured within the pages. Also documented are the 67 comic books, 3 Big Little Books, the 1942 Matinee Serial, the two movies (1955 and 1956), the GANG BUSTERS collectibles, a biography about Phillips H. Lord who created the program, and much more can be found within the pages including reprints of contract negotiations, interoffice memos, correspondence - heck, you get the idea! The book is due for release June 2004.

RETURN WITH US NOW...

From the Desk of the Editor by Carol Tiffany



Here we are in June ... the year is already half gone and your editor is still writing "2003" on some checks. Perhaps by September I will finally realize it's 2004.

This month's issue features a wonderful sample from Martin Grams Jr's forthcoming book about Gangbusters. Gangbusters was one of my favorite programs as a youngster and this article has only whetted my appetite for the book. Mr. Grams is a well-respected radio historian and prolific author of many books about OTR. His more recent books include: "Invitation to Learning", "Inner Sanctum Mysteries: Behind the Creaking Door", "the I Love a Mystery Companion", "Suspense, Twenty Years of Thrills and Chills", "The History of the Cavalcade of America", "Radio Drama: A Comprehensive Chronicle of American Network Programs 1932-1962", "Information, Please", and "The Sound of Detection: Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio".

Good Listening (and reading) to all...



New in the Tape and CD Libraries

by Dick and Maletha King

This month we're expanding our CD library with the addition of two very popular offerings. First, we've added early "Lux Radio Theatre" shows which date back to 1936. One of the very interesting features of these Lux dramas was an interview at the middle break with people involved with the shows. This included the directors and producers, the writers, stylists, silent screen stars and even gossip columnists. Lux was always known for the fine acting that emulated the original screen plays, and it was with great skill that they were able to bring the shows down to just one hour.

We then go on to many of the early "Escape" shows - circa 1947. In both of these series we have included some shows that are not in any of our other libraries.