



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

Volume 28, Number 8

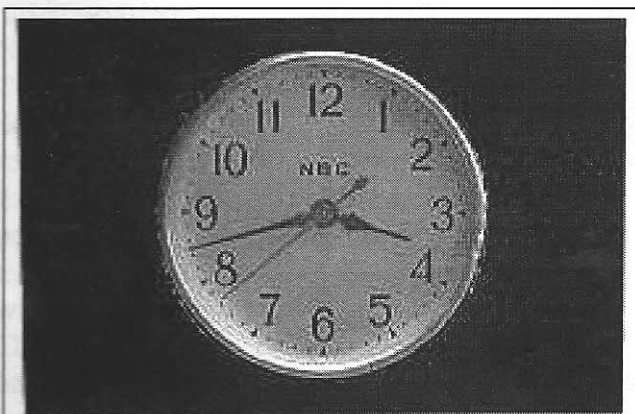
August, 2004

Three Famous Notes of Broadcasting History - The NBC Chimes (cont.)

by Bill Harris - nbcblue@hotmail.com

"When you hear the chime, it's NBC time"
"By Choice The Nation's Voice"

The device use to automatically ring the chimes at a pre-set time was a Telechron clock that controlled the Rangertone chimes machine. This was a three-inch diameter clock with NBC on the dial face and was mounted in a panel above the chimes machine. Below is one of these NBC Telechron clocks that is part of my personal NBC collection. I am not sure what function this one played at NBC but I am rather certain it was not one of the clocks associated with controlling the chimes, but is of the type used in that function.



Telechron Clock Model SO3F52, manufactured for General Electric by the Warren Telchron Co.

Notes of Discord

Not everyone was thrilled with the chimes. The number of complaints about the chimes decreased after the automatic chimes were installed and the chimes were no longer hand-struck. However, there were some who wanted to change the sound of the chimes or eliminate them altogether. A memo from John F. Royal to O. B. Hanson suggested that the cue used originally "National Broadcasting Company" should be sufficient and the chimes were not really necessary. His opinion was that the chimes had become "monotonous" and "we could devise something much pleasanter to listen to than the three-note chime - something with some real music in it and that could be changed from time to time to relieve the monotony and still retain the identity".

W.F. Fairbanks, in an Interdepartmental Correspondence to Mr. Keith Kiggins suggested that the chimes on the Blue Network be different from the Red Network chimes. "Specifically, I would like to see some serious consideration given to a change in Blue Network chimes that would unquestionably identify the programs being carried over this network." He suggested adding 4, 5, or 6 carefully selected notes to the present three-note chime so the well known NBC musical trade mark would be retained but would give the Blue Network a unique label.

There were several letters from listeners who suggested changes to the chimes. In a letter to General Sarnoff, the head of RCA, a Mr. Reily wanted to "change the notes so they sound like NBC." In a reply to Mr. Reily, Niles Trammel explains that there is no "N" note and that
(Continued on page 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

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KFKA 1310 AM	"Radio Memories" (Greeley)	Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00 PM
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KUVO 89.3 FM	"Destination Freedom"	9:00 PM

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

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**PLEASE NOTE THAT CASSETTE LIBRARY #1 IS TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE
AND THE CD LIBRARY HAS A NEW LIBRARIAN**

Convention Schedules

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>

SPERDVAC Convention, November 12 - 14, 2004 at the Hacienda Hotel at LAX. (airport) Bob Lynes will be the convention chair. 1 (877) 251-5771 or www.sperdvac.org

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experiments had been done using the Sonovox system to modulate the voice of an announcer with the musical notes as he spoke the letters NBC, but found it to be "unharmonious." Another suggested making the chimes sound like the Morse Code for the letter "V" to aid in the war effort. Roy C. Witmer responded to that suggestion in a memo by saying, "If I thought for one moment that sounding the letter "V" on our chimes even a million times would contribute in the slightest to winning the the war, I would certainly vote for it with all my might. However, to me a thing of that kind is just plain silly and accomplishes but one thing - it confuses everybody".

In a 1940 Interdepartmental Correspondence from A. L. Ashby to Niles Trammel, someone had suggested using the phrase "When you hear the chime, it's NBC time" immediately following the chimes. Another suggestion was to have a vocalist sing the letters N B C to the tune of the chimes.

Even automobiles were trying to get into the act. In a memo from E.P.F. James to Mr. Ken R. Dyke, James asked the Purchasing Department to investigate the possibility of contacting the manufacturer of the horns used by the trolley buses at the New York World's Fair that play the tune "The Sidewalks of New York", to have suggest the manufacture of automobile horns that would play the sound of the chimes.

The Fourth Chime... A Confidential Alert

The fourth chime is what started my interest in this subject. The book *The Fourth Chime* stated that it was originally contrived as a confidential alert to signal the members of the NBC news staff, engineers, and other personnel responsible for broadcasting the news to the people. The book states that it was first heard on the air with the crash of the dirigible Hindenburg, May 6, 1937 at Lakehurst, New Jersey. However, an NBC Interdepartmental Correspondence memo, dated April 7, 1933 documents the conception and initial purpose of the fourth chime. The memo states, "In anticipation of the Spring and Summer months, when many in key positions will not always be available at home telephones, the following Emergency Call System will go into effect on Monday morning, April 16th." The memo states that whenever a fourth tone is heard on the network chimes rung at fifteen-minute intervals, it will indicate that someone on an attached list is wanted. Upon hearing this fourth

chime, all personnel on the list are instructed to call in to the PBX operator to ascertain whether or not the Emergency Call is for them. The chime would continue at fifteen-minute intervals over stations WEAF and WJZ until the wanted person communicated with the PBX operator. The list contained the names of the following NBC executives:

- John F. Royal
- John W. Elwood
- Frank Mason
- J de Jara Almonte

The list also included names of personnel from Engineering, Press, Programming, Traffic, and Service departments.

I believe that the above confirms that the original purpose of the fourth chime was not necessarily an alert to signal news breaking events, but simply a call system, much like a paging system today, for key personnel to call the office. The sounding of the 4th chime in conjunction with the crash of the Hindenburg was probably it's first use as an emergency signal to alert NBC staff and other personnel of a breaking news event.

It was fortunate that Chicago radio station WLS news reporter Herb Morrison was sent to Lakehurst, New Jersey that day in 1937, with a recording device to record sound effects of the Hindenburg landing. The arrival of the Hindenburg was not a newsworthy event as the landings were then quite commonplace, so little did Morrison know that he was about to make one of the most famous recordings of a news event in history. With the airing of Morrison's recording the next day over both the Red and Blue networks, NBC's strict rule against using recorded material for broadcast was broken for the first time in it's history so the radio audience could hear this dramatic eye-witness account of this tragic event. Jack Hartley, a reporter and member of one of the NBC Mobile units that was dispatched to the crash sight is quoted in the book *I Live On Air*, "There were about a dozen of us in the original party that left with Mobile Unit No. 1. Shortly before we started, we broadcast an emergency signal to all of those attached to the News and Special Events Department in the New York Office. This was done by means of *the fourth chime*." Both WJZ and WEAF, the Blue and Red network stations in New York broadcast the signal. The fourth chime was sounded again during the Munich crisis in 1938, with the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor,

December 7, 1941, and during the early morning hours just preceding the bulletins announcing the D-Day invasion June 6, 1944.

The fourth chime continued to be used throughout World War II to alert the NBC news department and the radio audience of special news bulletins.

“The Fourth Chime will ring out again and again from the NBC News room in New York whenever events of utmost significance demand the intensive nationwide coverage of the news the American people have come to expect from the National Broadcasting Company.”

The home of the chime was the RCA building in NYC, room 404, the *News and Special Event's Room*.



I received a tape of a documentary produced by a radio station in Washington D.C., of NBC news broadcasts of the 1944 D-Day invasion of Europe. In one of the early morning bulletins, just before the announcement of the beginning of the invasion, the fourth chime can be heard. Rod Phillips wrote in his article on the history of the chimes that the fourth chime was a second strike of the “C” note, and this is in agreement with a June 6, 1964 NBC memo from the Press department. I therefore assumed that the fourth chime sequence would be G-E-C-C. I was surprised at what I heard on the tape. The sequence of the notes was B-D-G-G, in the key of G. If you transpose this sequence to the key of C, they become E-G-C-C. As stated in an earlier paragraph the note arrangement of E-G-C are the notes as originally used by radio station WSB, and the first three notes of the World War I song *Over There*.

Why did NBC use that sequence for the fourth chime? Was there some patriotic reason because of the war song, or did it just sound better than G-E-C-C? Why was it sounded in the key of G instead of the key of C? Perhaps they wanted a **RETURN WITH US NOW...**

different sequence and tone that would not be confused with the so familiar G-E-C notes and would be more likely to catch the attention of the listener and NBC news staff.

According to the book, the fourth chime was sounded two times during the D-Day broadcast, once at 2:30 A.M. to put the network on a *flash* basis; the chime alert calling all newsmen and commentators to their microphones, and key operating personnel to their stations. Then at 3:18 A.M. the chime was sounded once more, followed a second later by the Morse code V (dit-dit-dit-dah) for Victory, repeated 5 times.

In an NBC memo from the Press Department dated June 12, 1964 commenting on the uses of the fourth chime, there is a hand written comment that the last use of the fourth chime was in 1985 when GE announced it's merger with RCA.

The General Electric Connection

Legend has it that the notes G-E-C were chosen because those were the initials of the General Electric Company, a part owner in NBC. I have found no hard documentation to substantiate this claim; however, the WGY claim of using those notes because of their affiliation with the General Electric Company has merit. I think one could surmise that since WGY sounded the notes on a piano, which offered a choice of 88 notes to chose from, the choosing of G-E-C was not accidental. However if we look at the Deagan hand chimes used by others, the four notes are G-C-E-high G, so it isn't difficult to see that with only those four notes to work with, G-E-C could easily have been chosen without any intended reference to the General Electric Company. So except for WGY, the use of G-E-C may have been just coincidence. In defense of this, in 1938, NBC engineer Morris made a trip to various European countries to observe the progress of television in Europe. D. C. Brinkenshaw of the BBC commented how he liked to listen to the States over short wave from the General Electric station at Schenectady N.Y. Mr. Morris states;

“He thought it most ingenious of them to use an aurally coded identification for the G. E. stations by using chimes with the notes G-E-C for General Electric Company. I tried to persuade him that the chime signal came from NBC and had nothing to do with General Electric. I'm not sure he really believed it.”

(to be continued...)

August, 2004

**Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons
A Complete History and Episode Log of Radio's
Most Durable Detective**

By Jim Cox

A Book Review by Stewart Wright

In his previous books, author Jim Cox has written about two of radio's most prolific producers ("Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory"), the last decade of the Golden Age of Radio ("Say Goodnight Gracie"), and several radio programming genres ("Radio Crime Fighters," "The Great Radio Audience Participation Shows," and "The Great Radio Soap Operas.") In his current book, Jim focuses his considerable research and writing talents on a single series that was one of his favorites when he was growing up: *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*. As readers have come to expect from any Jim Cox effort, he has intensively and thoroughly researched his chosen subject, uncovered much new information, and written a highly entertaining and enlightening volume on radio's longest-running detective series.

The book starts with "Chronology: A Mr. Keen Almanac" which is a convenient time line for the series which provides information in an outline format including dates, days, and times of broadcasts; primary cast and crew; networks; and sponsors.

In the chapter "The Aural Sleuth: Murder and Mayhem on the Air," Jim discusses the popularity and significance of the private investigator during the Golden Age of Radio.

The origins and evolution of the Mr. Keen character are examined in the next three sections. The "Origins of a Supersleuth" covers the literary lineage of Keen in the writings of Robert W. Chambers and how Mr. Keen was adapted for radio by Frank and Anne Hummert. In Chambers' writings the kindly old investigator was a matchmaker for the wealthy. The next two chapters describe how Mr. Keen evolved over time on the radio: starting as the "Tracer of Lost Persons" in 1937 and by the mid-1940's transforming into a more intense, relentless chaser of murderers.

The dictates of the Hummerts often led to unintentional humorous situations and dialog on the series and are mentioned in the chapter "Funny Business." These gaffs lead to satires on the series by the comedy team of Bob and Ray: *Mr. Trace Keener Than Most Persons* and *Mr. Treat, Chaser of*

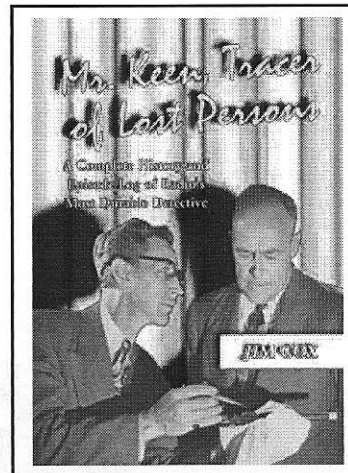
Lost Persons. These Bob and Ray sketches of the series are also addressed.

Many entertaining anecdotes about cast and crew members are included in the chapter "Hired Guns." There are also numerous biographical sketches of the writers, lead actors, directors, announcers, sound effects artists, and musicians.

The advertisers on *Mr. Keen* are discussed on "Sold on Radio."

Collectors will be intrigued by the Radio Episode Guide for the 1693 installments of *Mr. Keen*. There is plenty of factual information: the broadcast dates and times, episode numbers and titles, episode plot summaries, and so forth, but there is much more! Jim mentioned at the beginning of this section that he attempted, "to craft an expansive, engaging, and useful episode guide." I can tell you that he has definitely succeeded. As I read Jim's episode summaries from the years of the thrice-weekly serial format, I found myself following Mr. Keen and Mike Clancy. Not only could I seem them in my mind's eye as they conducted their investigations, I could also hear them!

Jim Cox has provided radio program enthusiasts with several of the finest works on various aspects our hobby. With the publication *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*, he has added another superlative volume to the body of Old-Time Radio literature.



**Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons: A Complete
History and Episode Log of Radio's Most Durable
Detective**

By Jim Cox, ISBN: 0-7864-1738-2

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From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany



Here we are in the "dog days" of August, and the weather seems to be trying to live up to the name. It would seem to be a good time to hunker down in front of a fan and listen to some great OTR or to read a good OTR book. Judging from the book reviews we have been getting there are quite a few great new books on the market.

This issue of RWUN contains the second installment of Bill Harris' wonderfully researched and well-written article on the NBC chimes. Your editor, for one, has learned quite a bit about those ubiquitous three notes which were a fixture on the radio as she grew up. Your newsletter staff hopes you are enjoying this article as well.

This month's quiz honors the canines of OTR in celebration of the "Dog Days" mentioned above. Good luck with this quiz... it is both challenging and sneaky.

Good listening to all...

**The Trivial Matter of OTR's
Magnificent Canines**

Can YOU name the owners/masters of these radio dogs along with the show on which they appeared? Extra credit if you can remember their breed.

- 1) REBEL
- 2) ASTA
- 3) DAISY
- 4) RIN-TIN-TIN
- 5) BULLET
- 6) LASSIE
- 7) TIGE (or TAG)
- 8) NEAL



*Are you aware of the changes to
the RHAC libraries?*

Please see page 2.

RETURN WITH US NOW...



**New in the Tape
and CD Libraries**

by Dick and Maletha King

This month our Reel-to-Reel and Cassette Libraries are offering seven reels of "Wild Bill Hickok" with Guy Madison and Andy Devine. In these stories Bill Hickok and Jingles help to bring law and order to the west in a bygone period of time. Jingles is usually good for some interesting theories on the jobs they're doing.

In addition, we've also added one reel of "Kraft Music Hall". This show needs no explanation other than to say that Bing Crosby was the host and had many guest stars on the show.

Maletha is still working to update the boxes from cassette library #1 This is our oldest cassette library and many of the boxes are in bad condition. The job is going to take longer than originally planned. In the meantime, this library is closed and **we are looking for a new librarian**. This library is very important as most of the newer members start out with it. If you would like to be a help to your club and become a librarian, to the members that enjoy these cassettes so very much, we would like to hear from you. **The librarian position is easier to handle than you might think.**

It's been noticed that some members are putting notes to the librarians on the outside of the boxes. It would be appreciated if message are put inside.

Answers to the Magnificent Canines quiz

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1) REBEL - Ricky West - Adventures of Champion | 1) German Shepherd |
| 2) ASTA - Nick and Nora Charles - Adv. of the Thin Man | 2) Wirehair Terrier |
| 3) DAISY - Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead - Blondie! | 3) Mixed Breed |
| 4) RIN-TIN-TIN - Rusty - Rin-Tin-Tin | 4) German Shepherd |
| 5) BULLET - Roy Rogers - Roy Rogers Show | 5) German Shepherd |
| 6) LASSIE - Rudd Weatherwax - Lassie | 6) Collie |
| 7) TIGE - Buster Brown - Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Gang | 7) Mixed Breed |
| 8) NEAL - George & Marion Kirby - Adv. of Topper | 8) Saint Bernard |
- BREEDS: (Bonus)