

SPERDVAC

RADIOGRAM

Vol. XVIII, No. 3 The Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy March 1992



The National Broadcasting Company's broadcast center in San Francisco. The Bay Area's contributions to American network radio are highlighted in a special feature by John Schneider. See page 3.

Jeanette Nolan, Mary Jane Croft & Parley Baer guest March 14



Jeanette Nolan

SPERDVAC will present some of the most famous voices from Hollywood's "Radio Row" at our March 14 meeting. Jeanette Nolan, Mary Jane Croft and Parley Baer will be our guests.

All three were among network radio's busiest performers during the thirties, forties and fifties.

Jeanette Nolan's credits include many of the top dramatic programs originating from New York and Hollywood. She and her late husband John McIntire performed frequently

on *Cavalcade of America*, *March of Time*, *Tarzan*, *Crime Doctor* and Orson Welles' *This is My Best*. She was also on *Suspense*, *CBS Radio Workshop* and *Gunsmoke*.

On *One Man's Family* Jeanette Nolan was Nicolette Moore, a love interest of Paul Barbour's. Later in the series Paul had a doomed romance going with Christine Abbott, portrayed by Mary Jane Croft.

Miss Croft was Mel Blanc's sweetheart
(Continued on back page)

MEMOS FOR MEMBERS

Many thanks to member John Schneider for his interesting article on San Francisco's contributions to network radio. John tells us this is the *abbreviated* version of a much larger piece he has written. He also provided most of the photographs.

And thanks, too, to actor William Alland for joining us as guest at our Feb. meeting. We had a great time hearing of his radio adventures with Orson Welles and the Mercury Players. Because of the lengthy feature on San Francisco radio in this issue, we are holding our follow-up on Mr. Alland's visit until the April edition.

There were some errors on Archives catalog page 119-120 issued last month. Since we are an historical organization, let's be accurate: The **Campbell Playhouse** story "I Lost My Girlish Laughter" on tape 1478 aired 1-27-1939. On tape 1497, the **Space Patrol** story "The Treasure of Planetoid 60" was broadcast 6-27-1953. Also from the **Space Patrol** set are these corrections: "Test for Survival" (tape 1512) is from 3-13-1954; "The Secret of Dr. Borodeck" (tape 1513) aired 3-20-1954; and "The Test of the XK-3" was broadcast 4-10-1954. Even though three people proof read catalog pages, it seems we missed these!

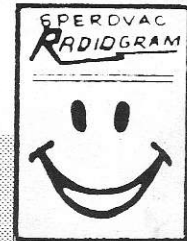
In addition to the shows on the last Archives catalog page, there are two more tapes of **Space Patrol** shows available. They are Tape 1530: "Voyage to the Future" 2-26-55 and "The Monster from the Past" 3-5-55; Tape

1531: "The Weed of Despair" 3-12-55 and "The Fugitive from Telarma" 3-19-55 (final show of the series). Thanks again to **Space Patrol** fan Andy Andersen for supplying the shows.

Singer Helen Forrest is ill and would enjoy hearing from friends, fans and former colleagues. Those interested in contacting her may write to P. O. Box 56344, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413.

SPERDVAC's annual convention is tentatively planned for Nov. 20-22. It's not too early to suggest convention programs and activities or to volunteer to assist us. We need help setting up and breaking down the equipment used during our panel discussions and recreations. Contact Larry Gassman at (310) 947-9800.

Last month in Barbara Watkins' "Information, Please" column member William Goldberg asked for details on Richard Webb's book about Captain Midnight. Mr. Webb, who played the captain on the 1956-1959 television series, called us to report the book will be published "before the end of the year." It will be a 352 page "coffee table size" book titled *I Played Captain Midnight*. The publisher is McFarland Press. His book concentrates on the television program since other publications have already covered the radio series. When it is released, he promises to let us know.



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(In memory of Meri Bell Sharbutt)

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(In memory of Dick Joy)

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(In memory of Jack Johnstone & John Dehner)

IN MEMORY OF DOUGLAS EDWARDS, PIONEER NETWORK NEWSCASTER

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John Wrisley

Naomi Lewis

Dick Murphy

Andy Russell

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Jack Brown

Seaman Jacobs

Mary Jane Croft Lewis

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SPERDVAC is very grateful to these individuals who have contributed \$50 or more to our organization during the past twelve months.

San Francisco's network radio broadcast centers of the thirties

During network radio's earliest years, coast to coast broadcasting wasn't yet possible. West Coast networks were established, with San Francisco as point of origination. Technology—and movies—brought network radio south to Hollywood.

by John F. Schneider

©1990 by John F. Schneider

The period of the 1930s and 1940s has been appropriately called "Radio's Golden Age." During these years, the nation was entertained and informed by a host of live coast-to-coast network broadcasts.

Radio historians have correctly identified the importance of New York, Hollywood and Chicago as network production centers during these years. However, little has been said about the role played by San Francisco.

The decade from 1927 to 1937 can easily be termed San Francisco radio's "Golden Decade." It was during that ten-year span that the city was a major origination point for nationwide network broadcasts, and that both NBC and CBS maintained production centers there.

NBC's Orange Network

Immediately after the National Broadcasting Company's first broadcast on the East Coast, Nov. 15, 1926, the network began seeking routes of expansion. On Jan. 1, less than two months later, a second NBC network was instituted, again serving only the eastern two-thirds of the nation. To distinguish between the two separate telephone-line networks, AT&T technicians used red designators at their jack panels for the original network's connections, and blue designators for the newcomer. The names of the two networks were casually derived from these practices, and the two networks became the NBC Red Network (the WEAF group) and the NBC Blue Network (The WJZ group).

In the beginning, NBC was "national" in name only, as its programs reached only as far west as Denver. In its first years, the company was unable to

set up a coast-to-coast hookup. AT&T had not yet installed broadcast-quality telephone lines across the Rocky Mountains.

To alleviate this problem, the NBC Board of Directors voted on Dec. 3, 1926, to establish a third NBC network: the Pacific Coast "Orange Network." They assembled a full duplicate of the New York program staff in San Francisco, and the Orange Network began originating programs for seven Pacific Coast stations: KPO and KGO in the Bay area; KFI, Los Angeles; KFOA, San Diego; KGW, Portland; KOMO, Seattle and KHQ, Spokane. The seven stations were connected by 1709 miles of program lines.

The inaugural program for the Orange Network was held April 5, 1927, less than five months after the first NBC broadcast in New York. It originated from temporary studios in the Colonial Ballroom of the St. Francis Hotel, as permanent studios in the new Hunter-Dolin Building were not ready for occupancy.

The program opened with an address by Henry M. Robinson, the Pacific Coast member of the NBC Advisory Board and president of the First National Bank of Los Angeles. Robinson spoke from the studios of KFI in Los Angeles. The program was then turned over to San Francisco for broadcast of music by Alfred Hertz and the San Francisco Symphony, and by Max Dolin, the newly appointed West Coast music director, conducting the National Broadcasting Opera Company.

On April 11, the network began regular broadcasting with the program **Eight Neapolitan Nights**, sponsored by the Shell Oil Company. The initial network schedule was 8 to 9 pm Monday and Saturday, and 9 to 10 pm Tuesday through Friday, giving the network a total of six hours of programs weekly. (At first

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The Orange Network recreated Red Network programs for West Coast listeners a week after they aired on the East Coast

the networks operated only in the evenings because circuits could not be spared from the standard telephone service during the busy daylight hours.

The Orange Network recreated the programs heard in the East on the Red Network. At the conclusion of a program in New York, all the program continuity, including the scripts and musical scores, would be shipped to San Francisco by Railway Express, where it would be rehearsed for performance exactly a week later. Thus, the San Francisco cast was producing such well known early network shows as **The RCA Hour**, **The Wrigley Program**, **The Standard Symphony Hour**, **The Eveready Light Opera Program**, and **The Firestone Hour**. At the conclusion of each program the announcer would say, "This program came to you from the San Francisco studios of the Pacific Coast Network of the National Broadcasting Company." This would be followed by the traditional NBC chimes.

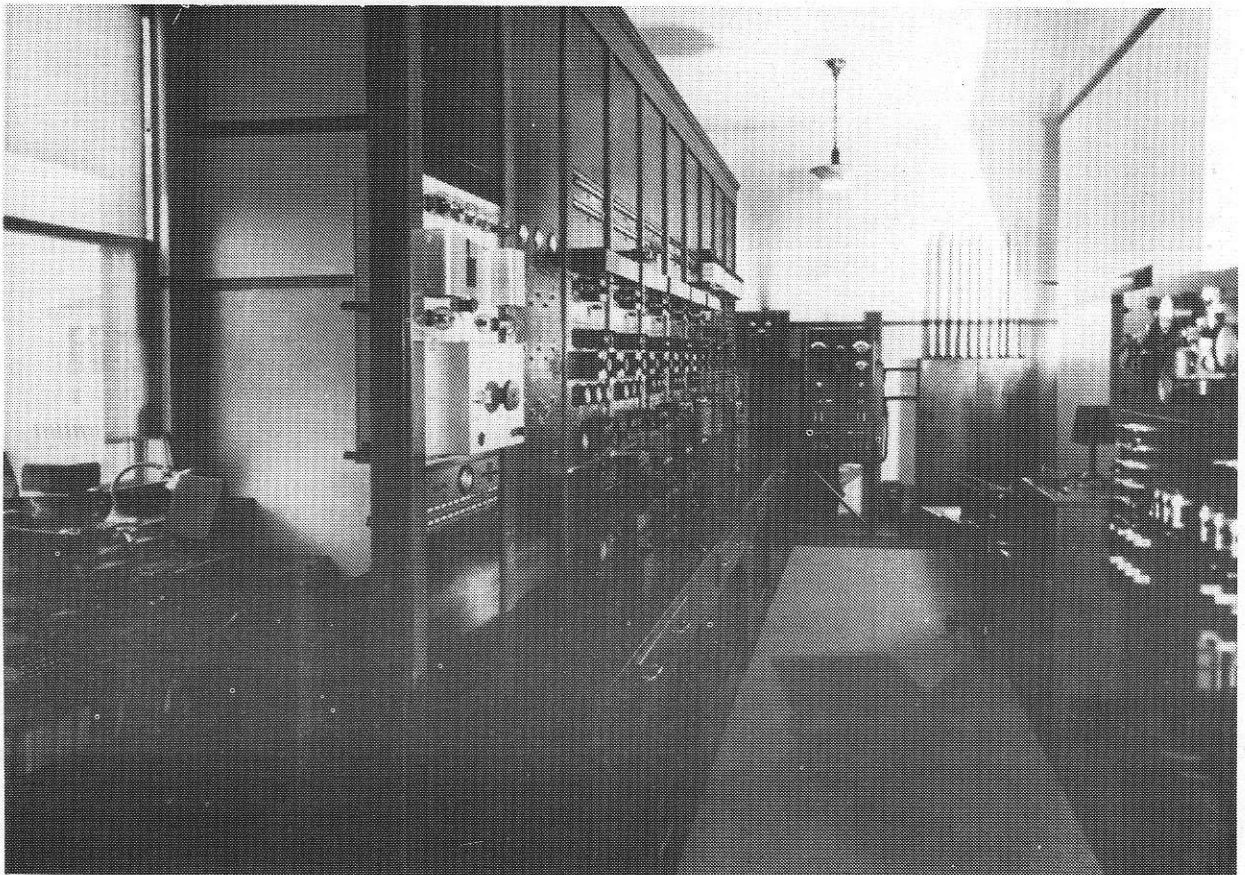
The chimes were a part of all NBC programs from the very beginning; however, they were considerably

longer and more involved than the later three-note chime. Because they were so long and clumsy, they were shortened to the better known G-E-C progression. It is said that the notes G-E-C stood for the "General Electric company," a melodic tribute to one of the network's major parent corporations. The original NBC chimes were struck by hand, but were replaced in the mid-thirties with electronically-produced, perfect-pitch chimes.

Shortly after the Orange Network's inaugural broadcast, the staff moved into its permanent headquarters in the Hunter-Dolin Building at 111 Sutter Street. The NBC studios occupied the entire 22nd floor, while the network offices were located on the second floor.

The studio complex included three completely equipped studios and an elaborate new pipe organ. It was in these studios that most of San Francisco's "Golden Decade" programs would originate. The entire NBC complex was decorated in a Spanish motif; one of its more unusual features was a glass-enclosed mezzanine, decorated to resemble a Spanish patio. It was designed so that a small audience could watch the programs while they were being broadcast. Some of the heaviest users of the booth were the sponsors of the

A portion of the master control room at NBC's Pacific Coast headquarters at 111 Sutter St. in San Francisco. The amplifiers on the panel at left fed the telephone lines to the network's affiliated stations.



San Francisco's network radio broadcast centers of the thirties

programs, and this experience sparked the establishment of sponsors' booths in network studios across the nation.

To staff its new network in San Francisco, NBC drew primarily from the existing area radio stations. KGO and KPO (now KNBR), the NBC affiliates, were hardest hit, and as the network schedule was expanded this process continued. One of the most popular KPO personalities to make the move was Hugh Barrett Dobbs, who moved his **Ship of Joy** program to the network, where it became the **Shell Ship of Joy**, sponsored by the oil company of the same name. Another person to make the move was Proctor A. "Buddy" Sugg, who came to NBC from KPO as a technician and gradually moved up the ladder until he became the nationwide executive vice president of NBC.

During the first few years of operation, program announcements were made by actors, musicians, or generally whoever was available. However, as the staff continued to grow, the first full-time staff announcer was hired.

He was also borrowed from a local station: Bill Andrews moved from KLX in Oakland to NBC in 1928. Other announcers followed: Jack Keough came from KPO; Jennings Pierce was recruited from KGO; Cecil Underwood was imported from affiliate KHQ in Spokane. Many others were gradually added until there were 17 at the height of the operation. Andrews became chief announcer in 1933.

The entire NBC-Pacific operation was headed by Don E. Gilman, vice president in charge of the Western Division. Gilman had been recruited from a local advertising firm in 1927 to manage the operation. Prior to that time, he had been one of the best known advertising men in the West, and had been president to the Pacific Advertising Clubs Association.

Initially, although the network provided several hours of programming to its affiliates, it had little impact over the day-to-day operations of the stations. KGO was operated by the General Electric Company, and KPO by Hale Brothers Department Store together with the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

This changed in 1932, when NBC leased the licenses and facilities of both stations (they were later purchased outright). When this happened, the program staffs of KGO, KPO and NBC were combined into one collective staff of over 250 persons. This included

complete orchestras, vocalists and other musicians (there were five pipe organists alone), and a complete dramatic stock company.

The entire operation was consolidated under one roof at 111 Sutter Street. It was there that all programming originated for the network, which then averaged about fifteen hours a week, as well as local programs for KGO and KPO. As a result, these stations lost their independent identities, except for their separate transmitter facilities. (KGO operated at 750 watts from a General Electric factory in East Oakland. KPO transmitted from the roof of the Hale Brothers Department Store with 5000 watts until 1933, when a new 50,000 watt facility was constructed on the bay shore at Belmont.)

The old KPO studio at the department store continued to be used for just one NBC program, **The Woman's Magazine of the Air**, with host Jolly Ben Walker. This was a morning home-economics show popular in the West for many years. Reportedly, the first bona fide singing commercial - that is, one sung for the sole purpose of praising a product - was heard on this program. The commercial was for Caswell's National Crest Coffee, and, according to Bill Andrews, "went something like this":

*Coffees and coffees have invaded the West,
But of all the brands, you'll find Caswell's the
best.*

*For good taste and flavor,
You'll find it in favor.
If you know your coffees,
Buy National Crest.*

Some of the other programs that originated from 111 Sutter Street during these years were **Don Amaizo, the Golden Violinist**, who played for the American Maize Company (the musician who performed for West Coast audiences was Music Director Max Dolin); **Memory Lane**; **Rudy Seiger's Shell Symphony**, broadcast by remote from the Fairmont Hotel; **Dr. Lawrence Cross**; and the **Bridge to Dreamland**, originated by Paul Carson and consisting of organ music by Carson intermixed with poetry written by his wife.

Throughout all of these programs, even though the performers went unseen by their radio audiences, NBC required formal dress. This meant that actors and

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announcers wore black ties, actresses wore formal gowns, and musicians wore uniform smocks, with the conductor in tie and tails. This was done for appearance, in the event that the sponsor or some other important person should drop in unannounced.

Until September of 1928, there was still no such thing as a weekly "coast-to-coast" network program. Even then, the connection between Denver and Salt Lake City was a temporary one made by placing a long distance telephone call. For a few months, eleven sponsors reached the Pacific Coast with their programs using this method.

AT&T finally completed the last link in the broadcast-quality telephone network in December of that year. The first program to use the new service was **The General Motors Party** on Christmas Eve 1928. Regular programming began shortly thereafter, and western listeners could now enjoy the original eastern productions for the first time. NBC now boasted a nationwide network of 58 stations, with the potential to reach 82.7% of all U.S. receivers.

With the inauguration of the new transcontinental service, the process of duplicating the programs of the eastern networks in San Francisco was discontinued. Because only one circuit had been installed, however, the Red and Blue networks could not be fed simultaneously. Instead, selection of the best programs from both networks was fed to San Francisco, where they were relayed to the western affiliate stations. Thus, the Orange Network continued to exist, although in name only.

Even though the duplication of programs was no longer needed, the Western Division staff was not dissolved. It continued to produce additional programs for western consumption only, which were used to augment the eastern schedule. In addition, the transcontinental line would occasionally be reversed, and programs produced in San Francisco would for the first time be fed eastward to the rest of the nation.

The first nationwide broadcast from the West Coast had been the Rose Bowl Game from Pasadena on New Year's Day, 1927, with Graham McNamee at the microphone. However, this had been accomplished on a temporary hookup over normal phone lines. The first regular coast-to-coast broadcast from the West over high-quality lines took place in April of 1930, with the broadcast of the **Del Monte Program** sponsored by the California Packing Company.

Other programs quickly followed. Soon the San Francisco staff was bigger than ever, simultaneously producing programs for local broadcast over KGO and KPO, for the western hookup, and for nationwide consumption. All of these production activities were further complicated by the time difference between the East and West Coasts.

This meant that a program for broadcast in the East at 7 pm would have to be performed in San Francisco at four, and then repeated three hours later for western audiences. Thus, it was not uncommon to have all three San Francisco studios in use at once: one producing a program for the East Coast, another for the West Coast, while a third was producing for one of the local stations.

Several programs produced in San Francisco within the next few years quickly gained nationwide popularity. Programs such as **Death Valley Days**, **The Demitasse Revue**, and Sam Dickson's **Hawthorne House** quickly gained nationwide popularity.

Dickson was one of San Francisco's best-known radio writers. He got his start there in the twenties at



McGee's Closet is a free service to our members and honorary members. Send your wants in OTR-related material to McGee's Closet, c/o Barbara J. Watkins, P.O. Box 561, South Pasadena, CA CA 91301.

WANTED: Capstan for Roberts 778X open reel to 8-track. \$50 reward. Contact: W. E. Fischer, 1907 N. W. Pine Lake Drive, Stuart, FL 34994.

WANTED: Excellent sounding big band remotes with (hopefully) ads intact. Will buy or trade for nice sounding shows. Contact: Don Maris, Box 200725, Arlington, TX 76006. (817) 261-8745.

WANTED: ONE MAN'S FAMILY cassettes, scripts and memorabilia. Will trade. Contact: Jim Bronson, c/o PDG, 201 San Antonio Circle, Suite 212, Mountain View, CA 94040. (415) 948-9200.

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KYA, writing shows that featured the station manager and the switchboard operator as principal characters.

In 1929 Dickson conducted a survey for the Commonwealth Club about radio advertising. Broadcast advertising had not yet come into its own, and there were many who voiced objections to radio being put to such a use. Dickson's survey was revolutionary, in that it discovered 90% of the city's radio listeners did not object to commercials, providing they were in good taste; virtually all of them actually said they patronized the few advertisers that were then on the air. The results of Dickson's survey were indeed revolutionary, but they also prompted a revolution he didn't expect—he was blacklisted by every station in town!

Sam Dickson fought the blacklisting as best he could. He was still doing some writing for KYA, and managed to do some for NBC under an assumed name. By the time NBC discovered his true identity, however, his work had become admired to the point where he was allowed to remain as a staff writer. He wrote scripts for many programs in the ensuing years, including two popular series, **Hawthorne House** and **Winning of the West**, as well as police stories and Biblical stories for children.

He continued with NBC as one of its most prominent writers up into the sixties, and later was the author of **The California Story**, a series heard on KNBC (formerly KPO, now KNBR) for a quarter century.

Several other San Francisco programs were na-

tionally known. One was **Carefree Carnival**, sponsored by the Signal Oil Company. This was a program of western music and skits broadcast from the stage of the Marines' Memorial Theater beginning in 1934. It was hosted by homespun Charlie Marshall and featured Meredith Willson's Orchestra.

The most famous program ever to originate in San Francisco, however, was **One Man's Family**. This program was a national favorite on radio and television for 27 years, and was always among the ten most popular programs in the nation. Its author, Carleton E. Morse, was the biggest figure in San Francisco radio at the time.

Morse was a newspaperman who made the transition to radio with NBC in 1929. He authored numerous successful radio productions, including **House of Myths**, **Chinatown Squad** and **Barbary Coast Nights**, before developing **One Man's Family**. It told the story of the Barbour family, an affluent, moral family residing in the Sea Cliff district of San Francisco. This series did not fit into any previously used program formula—it was unlike anything that had been done on radio up to that time. It simply told the story of everyday life in a model family. Morse hoped it would become popular because the public would identify closely with its characters.

The program made its debut on Friday, April 29, 1932. It was carried from 9:30 to 10:00 pm on just three

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The Carefree Carnival was broadcast in 1936 from the stage of the Marines' Memorial Theatre in San Francisco. In the group at right, Meredith Willson is in the center conducting the NBC Orchestra.

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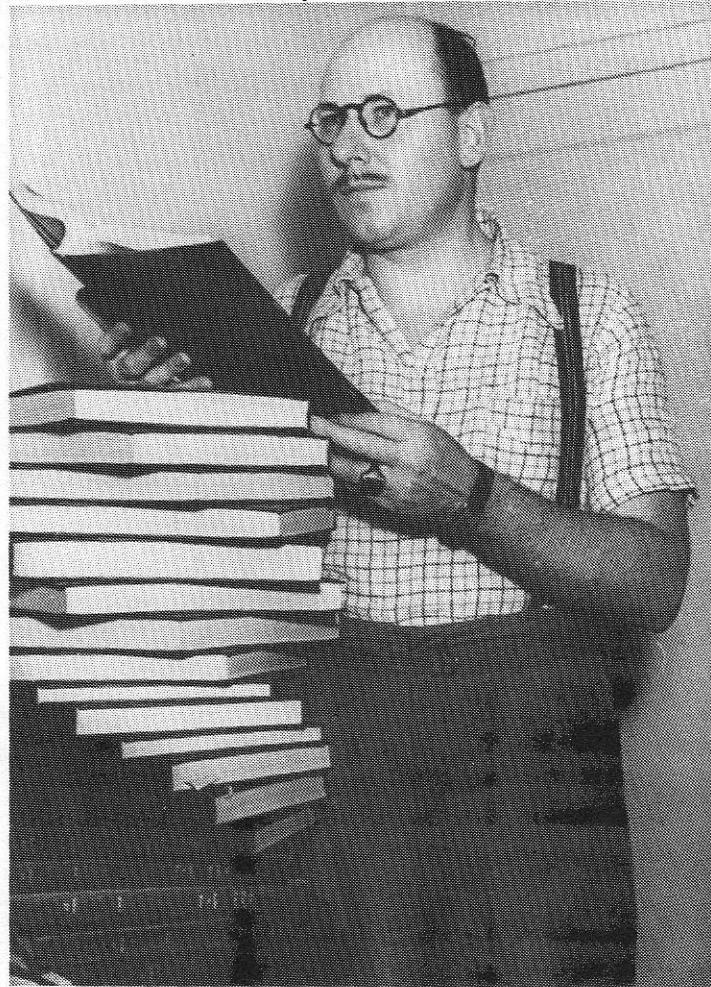
stations, in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle. However, after the first few episodes, the other West Coast stations requested that the program be opened to the entire network.

Western listeners responded to the program almost immediately, and their response was overwhelming. **One Man's Family** quickly became one of the most listened-to programs on the Coast. However, the story concept was new, and companies were reluctant to sponsor it.

After almost a year as an unsponsored feature, an announcement was made at the end of an episode that NBC was considering dropping the program, and that audience response was being solicited. The thousands of letters that swamped the mail room overwhelmed everyone, especially Morse. In a final, desperate attempt to woo a sponsor, the sales manager hired a suite of rooms in one of San Francisco's posh hotels and scattered the many letters over the floors, furniture, and every other horizontal surface.

After wining and dining officials of the Wesson Oil Company in the hotel dining room, he took them up to the suite, where he showed them the scene and invited them to read just one letter. Needless to say, they bought the series; Wesson Oil and Snowdrift became sponsors of **One Man's Family** Jan. 18, 1933.

On May 17 of that year, the program became one of the first San Francisco programs to be piped through the transcontinental line to the East, where it was heard



*Carlton E. Morse, shown with bound volumes of his radio scripts, authored **One Man's Family**, one of the first programs to move from San Francisco to Hollywood.*



*The cast of **One Man's Family** in NBC's San Francisco studios in 1934. From left are Kathleen Wilson, Walter Patterson, announcer Bill Andrews, an NBC sound effects man, Bernice Berwin, Michael Raffetto, Minetta Ellen, Page Gilman and J. Anthony Smythe.*

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nationwide for the first time. Wesson Oil sponsored the Western production, while the version heard in the East was sustaining, or unsponsored. Separate scripts had to be utilized for nearly eight months, until eastern audiences could catch up with the story line and the two productions could be consolidated.

NBC took two major steps in 1935 that had a profound effect on Pacific Coast radio. The first was the opening of a second Pacific Coast network. Now, for the first time, the entire complement of programs from

both NBC networks could be heard on a nationwide basis.

The original NBC Orange Network, with the exception of KGO, became the Pacific Coast Red Network. KGO, along with KECA, Los Angeles; KFSD, San Diego; KEX, Portland; KJR, Seattle and KGA, Spokane formed the new Western Blue Network. The latter three stations had been a part of the "Gold Network" from 1931 to 1933, after the demise of the

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Actor John Dehner, radio's Paladin, dies

by Dan Haefele

John Dehner, known in radio as the star of **Frontier Gentleman** and **Have Gun—Will Travel**, died Feb. 4. He was 73.

Dehner began his acting career in New York in 1937. After a short time he came to Los Angeles to work as an animator for the Disney Studios, working on "Bambi" and "Fantasia." He was later drafted into the Army and after his military service was completed, he decided to try radio.

"I had never seen a (radio) microphone in my life, but I auditioned at KFAC and I was hired," he told SPERDVAC in 1982. "But I was awful and got fired."

The experience didn't keep him from continuing in the medium. "I learned enough (at KFAC) to audition for a job at KMPC. Eventually, I became news editor of KMPC, after working as an announcer there for a couple of years," he said.

"Then I was fired from that job," he continued. "I went to KFVB. I became an announcer and news editor. I was fired from that job, too."

While at KMPC, Los Angeles, Dehner was the star of their program **The Hermit's Cave**. He was the hermit.

Dehner credited actress Virginia Gregg as "the person who had more influence and did more for me, getting me started as an actor in radio." She recommended him to director Norman Macdonnell. After the introduction, Macdonnell hired Dehner frequently for radio acting jobs.

He was a frequent actor on a number of Hollywood's network radio programs. With his deep, booming voice, he was a heavy on many episodes of **Gunsmoke**. He appeared often—without credit—on **The Whistler**.

When most of network radio had given way to television, Dehner was hired to star on the Antony Ellis creation, **Frontier Gentleman**. He played J. B. Ken-

dell, a British journalist who wrote accounts of life on America's Western Frontier for the *London Times*.

"Tony (Ellis) liked that show better than any show he had ever done in his life. And I think it showed," he said. "He would very often refer to that show with great affection."

Ellis was the program's producer-director. He also wrote all of the scripts. "It was one of those shows that was so well written that it played itself," Dehner once observed. "For me, it was a very comfortable and enjoyable show."

The series ran just nine months, from Feb. 2 to Nov. 16, 1958. CBS replaced it the following week with a radio version of **Have Gun—Will Travel** and Dehner was again the star.

Dehner starred as Paladin, a high-priced hired gunman. Appearing on almost every episode with him were long-time radio friends Virginia Gregg and Ben Wright. The series' final broadcast was Nov. 27, 1960.



John Dehner at a SPERDVAC meeting in 1982.

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Seattle-based American Broadcasting Company, the first of several networks to use that name. The Gold Network was discontinued by NBC in 1933 to save line costs. The West Coast Blue Network began with the broadcast of the Rose Bowl Game from Pasadena on New Year's Day, 1936.

The second major event of 1936—the one that ul-

timately proved to be fatal for San Francisco's position as a broadcast center—was the breaking of ground for NBC's new Hollywood studios. This was in response to the American public's increasing desire for West Coast programs. The success of **One Man's Family** and other early Coast offerings played a part in this process.

"The Announcers' Delight"



Every NBC-San Francisco announcer had stories to tell about encounters with the "announcers' delight." Network announcers—not the engineers—were responsible for pushing the correct series of buttons to direct programs to the right stations. Sometimes the wrong show or an inappropriate announcement went over the airwaves. Once an errant voice man announced "this nonsense was brought to you by the National Broadcasting Company" to listeners of a speech by the Pope.

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But more important was the public's desire to hear their favorite Hollywood movie stars on the radio. Rudy Vallee apparently started the trend in the early thirties. While in Hollywood for the making of a motion picture, he broadcast his weekly program from California and introduced his audience to film-star guests. This trend advanced rapidly, and there were no fewer than 20 network programs released from Hollywood over NBC and CBS during the 1934-35 season.

In the first years of the NBC network, it had been necessary for Hollywood stars to travel to San Francisco to make a broadcast, a requirement that severely limited the frequency of their appearance. This had been necessary because AT&T's broadcast lines fed from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and not the other way around.

Programs were fed nationwide from city to city on a serial hookup, and Los Angeles was the end of the line. In order for programs to be fed nationally from Los Angeles, they would have to be fed eastward by a separate circuit to Chicago, where they could connect into the network. When Eddie Cantor moved his **Chase and Sanborn Program** to Hollywood in 1932, this aspect added \$2,100 per week in line charges to the program's budget.

The limitations of the AT&T network began to be overcome in 1936, under pressure of the network's desire to satisfy the public's taste for Hollywood programming. The new circuit that was constructed to bring the Blue Network to the Coast in 1936 terminated in Los Angeles instead of San Francisco. Further, AT&T had incor-

MARCH 1992

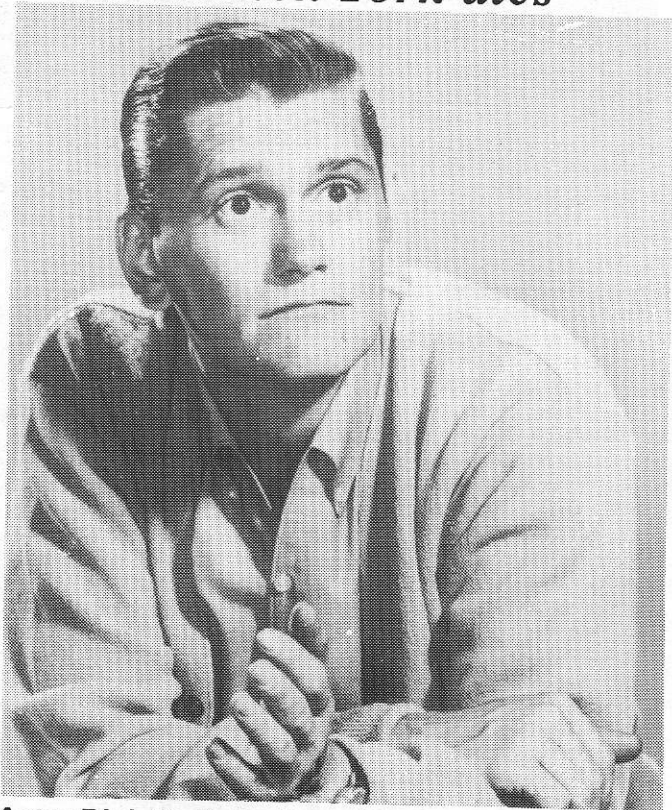
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porated a new system called the "quick reversible" circuit. Under this arrangement, the operation of a single key would reverse the direction of every amplifier in the line between Los Angeles and Chicago, so that the same line that formerly fed westward could now move programs from west to east.

The circuit could be completely reversed in less than 15 seconds, well within the time of a station break. Thus in 1936 it became economical to produce national programs in Hollywood on a wide scale for the first time. Big Hollywood names like Al Jolson, Bob Hope and Clark Gable were regularly heard on NBC after that year.

The new NBC Hollywood studios officially opened for business Oct. 17, 1938. Sprawling over a 4 1/2 acre tract at Hollywood and Vine, the \$2 million facility became the new Western Division headquarters for the network. The West Coast executive offices that had been divided between San Francisco and Los Angeles were consolidated in a new three-story execu-

Actor Dick York dies



Actor Dick York died Feb. 20 at age 63. He began his acting career in Chicago radio. For a short time was played Billy Fairfield on Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy. Later he was a star of Armstrong of the SBI. He has numerous TV and film credits, including the television series "Bewitched" and a role in the motion picture "Inherit the Wind."

tive building. There were eight studios, including four auditoriums that seated 350 persons each, the largest ever constructed for radio.

The opening of the Hollywood studios and improvements to the AT&T leased-line system marked the beginning of a gradual exodus that, over a five-year period, saw virtually all of San Francisco's network programming move to Hollywood.

By 1942, only a skeleton crew remained to program the local stations. One of the first programs to leave was San Francisco's beloved **One Man's Family**. Production of this program was transferred to Hollywood in August of 1937, even before the new studios had been completely finished.

For a while, NBC intended to operate equal personnel and artist staffs in both cities. To that end, NBC began to draw up plans for an elaborate new studio building in San Francisco to replace the outmoded facility at 111 Sutter Street and match the opulence of the new Hollywood facility. This was NBC's Radio City, which drew national acclaim for both its architectural and broadcast features. And it was built by mistake.

Plans were drawn up and bids taken in 1940 for the construction of an ultramodern four-story studio complex at Taylor and O'Farrell Streets. Meanwhile, NBC apparently changed its mind and decided to move all the remaining operations to Hollywood. [See photo on the front cover.]

According to one story, the ground breaking was set to begin when the West Coast vice president received a telegram from New York. It said a decision had been made to phase out the San Francisco operation, and that the new building must not be built. But, it was too late; the event, once set into motion, could not be reversed. The vice president himself officiated at the ground breaking ceremony that day, the telegram in his pocket.

The million-dollar facility was formally dedicated April 26, 1942. It was an impressive edifice, four stories of pink, windowless walls with layers of glass brick outlining each floor. Over the marquee, at the main entrance to the building, was a three-story mosaic mural designed by C.J. Fitzgerald which depicted different facets of the radio industry. Inside, facilities included a 41-by-72 foot main studio, two 24-by-44 secondary studios, and four smaller studios. In addi-

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RADIOGRAM PAGE ELEVEN

tion, a parking garage occupied practically the entire first floor.

One of the smaller studios, Studio G, was equipped with a false fireplace, four rugs and comfortable furniture. It was reserved for VIP guests exclusively; Harry Truman, Gen. David Sarnoff and H.V. Kaltenborn were just a few of those who eventually used it. Another feature of NBC's radio palace was a roof garden where Sam Dickson, Dave Drummond, James Day and other staff writers would produce scripts in their swimsuits and work on their suntans at the same time.

The building was a magnificent tribute to the state of the art. It was also San Francisco's last great fling as a radio center, for less than a year after its completion the southward exodus had ended, and the most of the facility stood unused except for an occasional network sustaining feature.

In the ensuing years much of the building was leased as office space, and the entire radio operation consisted of a disc jockey playing records in a third floor booth. KGO was moved to Golden Gate Avenue in the early 1950s, and KPO, by then known as KNBR, moved out in 1967. That was the year the building was sold to Kaiser Broadcasting Company, and became the new home of KBHK Television. At last, it finally began to see extensive usage for the purpose for which it was built.

The Don Lee-Columbia System

During the thirties, 111 Sutter Street was not the only network broadcast address. The other was 1000 Van Ness Avenue, the Don Lee Cadillac Building, headquarters for KFRC and the Don Lee-Columbia Network. It was there that another radio legend was born.

Don Lee was a prominent Los Angeles automobile dealer, who had owned all the Cadillac and LaSalle dealerships in the state of California for over 20 years. After making a substantial fortune in the auto business, he decided to try his hand at broadcasting.

In 1926 he purchased KFRC in San Francisco from the City of Paris department store. The following year he bought KHJ in Los Angeles and connected the two stations by telephone line to establish the Don Lee Broadcasting System. From the beginning, Lee spared no expense to make these two stations among the finest in the nation, as a 1929 article from Broadcast Weekly attests:



KFRC station manager Harrison Holliway, creator of Blue Monday Jamboree, was part of the radio exodus to Hollywood. He was hired as station manager of KFI.

"Both KHJ and KFRC have large complete staffs of artists, singers and entertainers, with each station having its own Don Lee Symphony Orchestra, dance band and organ, plus all of the musical instruments that can be used successfully in broadcasting. It is no idle boast that either KHJ or KFRC could operate continuously without going outside their own staffs for talent, and yet give a variety with an appeal to every type of audience."

In 1929, CBS still had no affiliate west of the Rockies. This was making it difficult for the network to compete with its larger rival, NBC. CBS president William S. Paley was in need of West Coast affiliates, and he needed them fast.

Thus it was that Paley traveled to Los Angeles that summer to convince Don Lee to sign a CBS

affiliate agreement. Paley was a busy man, and he was frustrated by Lee's casual, time-consuming ways of doing business. Lee insisted that Paley spend a week with him on his yacht "The Invader" before any business could be discussed.

After two lengthy sailings during which Lee had plenty of opportunity to evaluate Paley's moral fiber in the relaxed, informal atmosphere at sea, Lee agreed to sign an affiliate agreement which Paley was to dictate without any negotiation whatsoever. The agreement was immediately executed, and the Don Lee stations became the vanguard of the CBS West Coast invasion on July 16, 1929.

The new chain was called the Don Lee-Columbia Network. Then more stations, KGB, San Diego and KDB, Santa Barbara, were purchased by Don Lee and became a part of the network. Also, Lee had been feeding programs to McClatchy Newspaper station KMJ in Fresno since 1928, and that station became a CBS affiliate, along with the other McClatchy stations (KFBK, Sacramento; KWG, Stockton and KERN, Bakersfield). Additionally, four Pacific Northwest

stations called the "Columbia Northwest Unit" were added (KOIN, Portland; KOL, Seattle; KVIT, Tacoma and KFPY, Spokane).

KFRC and KHJ originated numerous programs for the West Coast network. CBS programs were heard in the early dinner hours, and the Don Lee programs were fed after 8:00 when the eastern programs ceased. Additionally, several of the San Francisco and Los Angeles programs were broadcast nationally by CBS.

Many of the most popular KFRC programs became network offerings in this way. Some of the most famous Don Lee-Columbia programs that originated from San Francisco were **Chiffon Jazz**, **Salon Moderne** with Bea Benaderet, and the **Happy-Go-Lucky Hour** with brothers Al and Cal Pearce, which debuted in 1929.

The latter program was heard nationally on CBS until 1933 when it moved to NBC and became **Al Pearce and His Gang**, a radio staple through the forties. Another early program to originate in San Francisco was **Blue Monday Jamboree**, a two-hour radio vaudeville extravaganza that became a West Coast sensation. The program was first created in 1927 by Harrison Holliway, KFRC station manager, and was heard nationally on CBS by the end of 1920. It was eventually moved to Los Angeles and became **Shell Chateau** with Al Jolson.

Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of KFRC and the Don Lee System during this period is the large number of people they graduated to national stardom. Meredith Willson was an unknown flutist when Lee hired him in 1929 to be KFRC's Music Director. Jack Benny's announcer Don Wilson began his radio career at KFRC as a member of the **Piggy-Wiggly Trio** before becoming a member of the announcing staff.

Ralph Edwards and Art Van Horn were also announcers; so was Mark Goodson, who had a knack for quiz shows. He had several on the Don Lee Network before he left for New York and teamed up with Bill Todman. Others first heard on the Don Lee System from KFRC were Art Linkletter, Harold Peary, Morey Amsterdam, Merv Griffin and John Nesbitt.

Don Lee died suddenly of heart failure on Aug. 30, 1934, at the age of 53, and Lee's son Tommy became president of the network. This presaged a series of events which completely restructured network broadcasting on the West Coast over the next three years.



San Francisco announcer James Matthews and actress Monty Margetts in a 1937 publicity photo at the time of their marriage. They, too, migrated to Hollywood radio.

San Francisco's contributions to network radio

CBS was apparently becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the structure of its western network. The affiliation between CBS and Don Lee, which had been a convenient mechanism for Paley to add affiliates quickly in 1929, was becoming a source of friction as CBS sought more and more control over its affiliates and programming.

Apparently this friction even preceded Lee's death. In any event, it came to a head March 19, 1936, when CBS consummated its purchase of KNX in Los Angeles for \$1.25 million. This was the highest price ever paid for a radio station to that time.

The acquisition of KNX gave CBS a 50-KW clear-channel network-owned facility in an increasingly important market. As mentioned previously, Hollywood-originated programs were becoming highly sought after by the radio public, and KNX would become the springboard for a major CBS West Coast program origination effort. The network's new studios, Columbia Square in Hollywood, were officially dedicated April 30, 1938.

Of course, the acquisition of KNX by CBS destroyed any remaining relationship with the Don Lee network. The purchase meant that KNX would replace KHJ as the CBS affiliate in Los Angeles. KNX had been sharing a number of programs with KSFO in San Francisco, so it was natural as well for the CBS affiliation in the northern city to transfer from KFRC to KSFO.

In fact, CBS soon announced it had leased KSFO with an option to purchase the station outright. (When the deal later fell through, CBS instead bought KQW in San Jose, which became KCBS.) The entire structure of the Don Lee Network quickly collapsed. The McClatchy stations lost no time in joining the Hearst stations KYA, San Francisco and KEHE, Los Angeles to form the short-lived California Radio System. The Northwest station group opted to remain with CBS.

As luck would have it, that same year a fledgling eastern network called the "Quality Station Group" had changed its name to the "Mutual Broadcasting System" and was rapidly seeking westward expansion. Tommy Lee contacted Mutual and lost no time in signing an agreement, and the Mutual-Don Lee Network was born. This was how Mutual became the fourth coast-to-coast network, and it also marked the beginning of a new West Coast chain that would

continue operation into the Fifties.

The switch from CBS to Mutual was scheduled for December 29, 1936, the date which marked the expiration of the CBS-Don Lee contract. (In fact for the last three months of the contract the CBS West Coast programs were produced at KNX and fed to KHJ for transmission to the network.)

The stations on the new Mutual network were the four Don Lee-owned stations, plus KFXM, San Bernardino; KDON, Monterey; KXO, El Centro; KPMC, Bakersfield; KVOE, Santa Ana and KGDM, Stockton. Also joining the network via shortwave hookup were KGMB, Honolulu and KHBC, Hilo. A number of Pacific Northwest stations were added the following year.

These upheavals had a major impact on KFRC as a radio production center. The CBS network feeds from the East had reached the West Coast at San Francisco, and branched north and south from there. This had made KFRC the key CBS West Coast station. But the new Mutual hookup reached the Coast in Los Angeles, and KHJ became the key station.

In the shakeup that followed these changes, most KFRC performers were either moved to KHJ or left to join other stations or networks. Key management personnel departed from both stations, including longtime KFRC manager Harrison Holliway, who became the manager of KFI. In short, the same forces that had caused the program exodus from San Francisco at NBC were at work within the Don Lee organization, and they occurred over the same period, 1936-1942.

Almost all network program production had left San Francisco by 1942. After that time, the city still saw some national prominence as the network news center for the war in the Pacific. It was also the programming and transmission headquarters for several shortwave stations broadcasting to the Pacific by the Office of War Information (This was part of the genesis of the Voice of America).

San Francisco also retained some importance as a facilities control point for the AT&T network. But it would never again see the prominence in broadcasting it experienced during its heyday of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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Radio in Review



TALLULAH BANKHEAD: A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY. By Jeffrey Carrier. Greenwood Press, Inc., 88 Post Road West, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881. 1991. Clothbound. \$42.95. 296 pages.

Tallulah Bankhead's career in radio was equal to her success on the stage. Best remembered for her personality (which was better known than her acting roles), she gave radio a shot in the arm in its dying days as hostess of **The Big Show**. NBC's attempt to stop the rise of TV was a critical success, but a financial failure.

She did 167 radio appearances, including 57 broadcasts of **The Big Show**. Beginning in 1933, she appeared on the air as a guest in comedy or dramatic sketches on programs ranging from **The Fred Allen Show** to **Theatre Guild on the Air**. But **The Big Show** will remain her best.

The highlight of this work is a log of **The Big Show**. Included are complete production credits, air dates, guest stars, and individual program highlights, where merited. Every program is represented from the first show, Nov. 5, 1950 to the final one, April 20, 1952. All make great listening.

To give this work a balanced look, the author also showcases Bankhead's contributions to other media including the stage, films, TV and recordings. Her professional accomplishments are noted and her personal life is recalled. Highly recommended, *dahlings!*

—Chris Lembesis

••••• :Ballots due for BOD election: •••••

The March 14 membership meeting is also the deadline for receiving ballots for the SPERDVAC Board of Directors' election. Members may deliver their ballots in person by 12:15 pm at the South Pasadena Public Library's community room. To submit ballots via mail, send them to Catherine Passarelli, 10615 Butterfield Road, Los Angeles, CA 90064. Envelopes should be clearly marked "ballot" and arrive by March 13. We'll tabulate them and announce the results at the meeting. Afterwards, the new Board will hold it's first meeting. Members are welcome to stay for the Board meeting, where the president and vice president will be elected for the 1992-93 term.

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April issue
March 20, 1992
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Radio stars guest March 14 *cont. from page one*
Betty on **The Mel Blanc Show**. She starred on **The Story of Sandra Martin**, a CBS soap opera about a young reporter on the fictional Los Angeles *Daily Courier*. Also on CBS, she was one of a repertory of a dozen unheralded radio professionals featured on **Twelve Players**. The program aired during the summer of 1945. And she was a regular on the **Beulah** series.

On the CBS 1950 sitcom **Honest Harold**, Croft played Evelina, a girlfriend of "Honest" Harold Hemp's. Pete the Marshall, another of Harold's friends, was played by Parley Baer.

Radio fans know Parley Baer best as Chester on the audio version of **Gunsmoke**. He appeared on numerous radio dramas, including **Suspense**, **Escape**, **Adventures of Phillip Marlowe**, **The Whistler**, **Count of Monte Cristo** and **The First Nighter Program**. Baer had a regular role on the comedy series **Those Websters**.

In recent years Jeanette Nolan and Parley Baer have acted in radio productions with Peggy Webber's California Artists Radio Theatre.

All three of our guests appeared on **Crime Classics** and **On Stage** at CBS in the early fifties.

SPERDVAC's March 14 meeting begins at 12 noon. We will meet in the community room of the South Pasadena Public Library, 1115 El Centro, in South Pasadena. Our meetings are open free to the general public. We encourage members and honorary members to bring their friends.

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