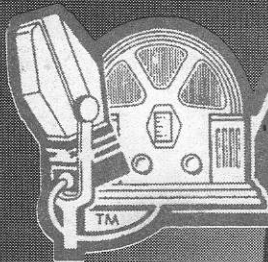


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RADIOGRAM

Vol. 34 • No. 1

October 2008



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RADIOGRAM

Volume 34 • Number 1 • October 2008



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RADIOGRAM

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The Mysterious Traveler



Radio's Masters of Misanthropy

THIS MONTH we honor one of the most neglected days of the year, October 15th, which is National Grouch Day. Merriam-Webster.com defines a grouch as "a habitually irritable or complaining person." That rather weak definition falls short of explaining the essence of the grouch or the grouch's role in society. On the other hand, our favorite medium, radio, was ahead of its time, as usual. Long before a day had been officially set aside to honor the grouch, radio was doing so on a routine basis. The grouch always seemed to be one of the most fully developed, three-dimensional characters on radio. Having taken an honest measure of the world, grouches determined that they had plenty of reason to be irritable. Radio gave names and voices to the habitually irritable, thus defining "grouch" in terms Webster never could.

So, herewith a countdown of five leading grouches who grumbled their way across the ether during the course of radio's golden age:

⑤ **Fulton Lewis Jr.** Listed here more as representative of a genre rather than a personality in his own right, Fulton Lewis Jr. was a staunchly conservative commentator who disliked FDR's New Deal and detested communism as well as various other isms and personalities. Lewis's dislikes were evident in his strongly worded radio commentaries. The journalist who actually deserves to be here more than any other is H.L. Mencken. Mencken postulated "boobocracy" or government run by boobs. Of course, Mencken seemed to apply the term "boob" pretty much across the board, even including himself from time to time. But while he made occasional appearances on radio, Mencken lacked a weekly venue to vent his renowned irritability. Mencken and Lewis may have differed politically but when it came down to irritability towards the world around them they each rebelled via the means most open to them: the English language.

④ **Henry Morgan.** A cover story in *Radiogram* a few months back spoke to the highlights of Morgan's acerbic career. The bottom line is that Henry was one of the most fundamentally honest voices on radio. He described the world as he saw it. The fact

that Morgan viewed the world through a glass darkly helped to explain his characteristic grouchiness.

③ **Dr. George Gamble (Arthur Q. Bryan).** Wistful Vista's leading physician and surgeon left his bedside manner at home each week during his encounters with Fibber McGee.

Case in point: Doc's reaction when he stumbled across McGee one day in the Wistful Vista Magic Shop: "And what are you doing in the magic shop, fumble thumb? If you're trying to find out how to make yourself disappear, please, do so and have them send me the bill."

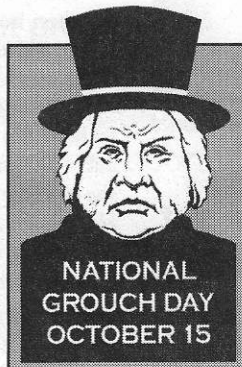
② **Osgood Conklin (Gale Gordon).** This one is almost too easy. The principal of Madison High School served nine years on radio as well as four seasons on television. During that

lengthy tenure, Conklin brilliantly portrayed a man who believed the world had been created with the specific goal of grating on his nerves. And many of us loved and sympathized with Conklin because we have all shared in those same feelings from time to time.

① **The Magnificent Montague (Monty Woolley).** Well, okay maybe Edwin Montague is in first place here because his alter ego, Monty Woolley, had played the consummate grouch, Sheridan Whiteside, in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* both onstage and on the silver screen. But Sheridan Whiteside managed to live again in Woolley's characterization of Edwin Montague, a renowned Shakespearean actor who had fallen upon more or less hard times and been forced to play the demeaning role of Uncle Goodheart on a radio soap opera. Under the circumstances, what serious actor wouldn't find himself in a perpetually grouchy mood? To Montague, radio was "the idiot's delight" and California the land of the "nutburger."

Grouches have been unfairly maligned over the years, but radio treated them with a bit more respect. The true grouch is a subtle blend of eccentricity, wit, personal outrage and passion. They deserve their own day; they deserve to be honored and celebrated for their clear-sighted honesty.

So on October 15 this year make a grouch miserable—be nice to him. Better yet, really make him miserable and take him out to lunch and pick up the tab. ♪





Molly Bee in the 1960 Universal-International motion picture *Chartroose Caboose*.

'Laughter in Bloom' set for October 19 benefit

The fabulous Eddie Carroll as Jack Benny will bring his "Laughter in Bloom" one-man show to the Scherr Forum Theater in the Civic Arts Plaza in Thousand Oaks on Sunday, October 19, at 2:30 p.m.



The complete show is a benefit for a new wing of the Thousand Oaks library as a "radio archives museum." The new wing will house the vast memorabilia collection of Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters.

The Scherr theatre is located at 2100 Thousand Oaks Blvd in Thousand Oaks. For performance information call (805)-449-2787.

Tickets are available by phone and online through Ticketmaster by calling (213) 480-3232 or (805) 583-8700, or online at www.ticketmaster.com.

General admission is \$35 with seniors and groups at \$30 plus a theatre service charge of \$4.

If you have not caught Eddie's one-man show then don't miss it this time. Eddie's performance as Jack Benny is, as the critic's say, "astonishing" and "simply amazing."

Singer-actress Molly Bee Set for October Meeting

Famed recording star worked with Cliffie Stone, Pinky Lee, Ernie Ford in radio and television

Singer/actress Molly Bee will be SPERDVAC's guest at its October 11 meeting at the Mid-Valley Library in North Hills.

Molly Bee began her career at the age of 10 when her mother took Molly to see Rex Allen, the singing cowboy, at a local concert. Allen was so impressed with her performance of "Lovesick Blues" that he had her perform on his radio show in Tucson after which Molly and her family moved to Hollywood where she became a regular on the television series *Hometown Jamboree* with Cliffie Stone. Interestingly, she was such a hit on the program that the program was occasionally referred to as "The Molly Bee Show." During this time she was also a regular on *The Pinky Lee Show*, appearing with the zany comic for three years.

Bee signed with Capitol Records when she was 13. Her first major success was "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" released in 1952. Next came a duet with Tennessee Ernie Ford called "Don't Start Courtin' in a Hot Rod Ford," which led to several appearances on *The Ford Show*.

Her career grew with more hit singles including "Young Romance" and "Don't Look Back," garnering her additional guest spots on TV variety shows. Reportedly, she starred in the title role of an unsold pilot for a TV sitcom called *Sissy* with Robert Easton and Roscoe Ates.

Her late 1950s celebrity status led to work in motion pictures. In 1958 she appeared in two teen romances, *Going Steady* with radio's Bill Goodwin and *Summer Love*. She appeared with Ben Cooper and Edgar Buchanan in the 1960 family comedy *Chartroose Caboose* and then appeared as herself in the teen musical *The Young Swingers* (1963).

In the early 1960s Molly was a fixture in Las Vegas, and after signing with the MGM

label in 1965 she charted with "It's Great . . . It's Molly Bee" album as well as releasing "Losing You" and "Miserable Me." In 1967 she guest-starred as herself in the motion picture *Hillbillys in the Haunted House* singing "Heartbreak USA." Also featured in the cast were country and western singer Ferlin Husky as well as John Carradine, Lon Chaney and Basil Rathbone.



Molly Bee singing "Heartbreak USA" in frame enlargement from the 1967 motion picture *Hillbillys in the Haunted House*.

Molly came full circle in 1975 with "Good Golly Ms. Molly" for Cliffie Stone's Granite record label. Her comeback included two charting singles: "She Kept on Talking" and "Right or Left at Oak Street."

The Mid-Valley Library is located at 16244 Nordhoff St. in North Hills. The meeting is free and open to the public.

New book offers life of Mrs. Eddie Cantor

How often Janet Gari heard that her mother was inadvertently as funny as her father, the legendary Eddie Cantor, and that she ought to write a book. The result was surprising, even to herself, as she uncovered her true relationship with her mother.

Janet Gari shares memories of her mother in *Don't Wear Silver in the Winter: Remembering My Mother*, a new book published by BearManor Media.

Whether Janet is describing situations in her native New York or the nine years she lived in Hollywood, the book is completely candid, and the rare photos are interesting and fun. Many celebrities are met under circumstances one would never expect. As one critic stated, readers should empathize with the Cantor clan's triumphs and tragedies as if the reader were a next door neighbor.

The 104-page paperback is available at BearManor Media at P. O. Box 71426 in Albany, GA 31708 at a cost of \$14.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling, and also at Amazon.com.



The Judy Canova Show

Audition recorded May 17, 1954 at CBS radio in Hollywood with Johnny Desmond, Paul Nero, The Mellow Men, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Jeff Chandler, Thurl Ravenscroft, Rudy Whistler and Perry Botkin. Music Directed by Charles Dant. Written by Fred Fox and Directed by Sam Pierce. Hy Averbach announces. Runs 59:05

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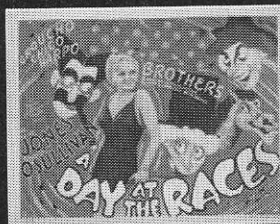
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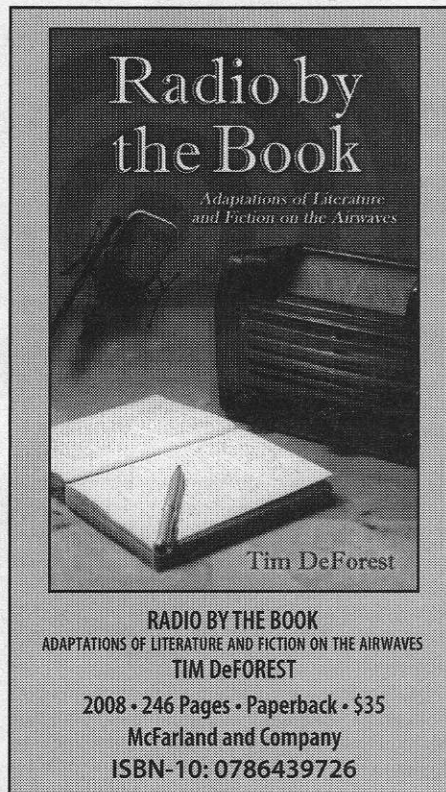
by Jim Cox

TIM DEFOREST's newest scheme for a radio volume is a challenging diversion: he cites myriad forms of popular fantasy and its intersection with the aural ether. In doing so he sometimes extends the lives of comic-page, pulp fiction and cartoon characters while projecting more into film, television and video incarnations that helped preserve them for future generations. The cross-pollination in DeForest's just-released *Radio by the Book: Adaptations of Literature and Fiction on the Airwaves* invariably turns into insightful vignettes with more than two score of celebrated radio series at its core.

While the vehicle used to project the reader into these pithy treatises is focused on the works of originators who didn't spend much, if any, time in radio, DeForest seamlessly makes transitions—and comparisons—after those who wrote for the ear and not the eye got hold of those concepts. In a few cases, the process is reversed as figures are introduced to listeners first while other modes expanded and extended their imaginary lives. The writing style is easy on the eyes, and the fact that each subject is presented in bite-sized portions makes the text attractive.

Most of the subjects from literature had many appearances prior to their radio embodiment. Not so with *The Falcon*; he materialized but once in a 1940 short story before going on the air in 1943. While every fictional character couldn't be included in DeForest's work, he attempted to corral most of the heavyweights. Surprisingly overlooked is broadcasting's most durable sleuth, *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*. An 18-year audio run (1937-55) was never surpassed although his legend was also attributed to a single print outing, a 1906 novel by Robert W. Chambers.

To his credit DeForest goes to bat for the radio listener on occasion, clarifying situations and underscoring matters that we wondered about but never knew whom to ask. He points out that a reformed Boston Blackie in radio (who aided the law there, having majored in debauchery in some previous modes), headlined a series with a recur-



ring bad habit: "The one mistake the show made and never corrected was the character of Inspector Faraday.... The poor policeman bumbled around annoyingly in every single episode, doing little to either advance the plot or entertain the audience.... On radio, poor Faraday was reduced to a mere dunce. In nearly every episode, he storms up to Blackie and threatens to arrest him for a recent murder—whether or not he had any reason to actually do so.... It was contrived, predictable and unnecessary.... It's too bad Faraday always remained such a stereotypical dunce; *Boston Blackie* could have been much better than it was." There were figures like Faraday on numerous shows; decades later, by banishing this one, DeForest stands up for Everyman, dismissing those trite characterizations that served no useful purpose.

The author picks up on other realities inherent in the radio features. With regard to *Mr. and Mrs. North*, he observes that "Pam,

Jerry and [Lt. Bill] Weigand all have their individual moments of sharp deductive reasoning, avoiding the trap of making a protagonist look smart simply by having everyone else look dumb." No individual stands head and shoulders above the others, he's saying, which probably didn't escape the notice of faithful listeners, either.

There are other times that it's difficult to accept everything DeForest states as fact. When he suggests "Perry Mason did better in the vast wasteland of television than he did on dramatic radio," he strikes a nerve. It's subjective, yet we disagree. He cites "the dearth of surviving episodes" as a handicap in fully comparing and appreciating the audio version, a logical explanation, and possibly a reason for the limiting assessment.

There are so many favorite shows and fictional folks in this book. For its inclusiveness, however, one wonders how two westerns—*Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Cisco Kid*—made the cut while so many of their venerated brothers did not. Think *Bobby Benson*, *Gene Autry*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Red Ryder*, *Roy Rogers*, *Straight Arrow*, *Tom Mix* and *Wild Bill Hickok*. Some pretty compelling law-and-order heroes there.

Awkwardly, we discovered more grammatical errors than customary for a McFarland release. While an occasional omitted word or incorrect term is anticipated, a series is disturbing, possibly hinting it was hastily proofed. Fortunately, this doesn't negate the obvious entertainment and educational benefits.

It's a delightful read, one that ought to be on every vintage radio collector's bookshelf. The 238-page softcover edition of *Radio by the Book* is available right now from www.mcfarlandpub.com and 800-253-2187. It's also available at Amazon.com.[!]

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THE SHADOW OF SARNOFF

A Tale of Two Kingdoms

by Jim Cox

In pursuing some research not long ago into the history of the National Broadcasting Company, a couple of childhood admonitions I have carried with me most of my life kept resurfacing in my mind. As I dug deeper into the investigation, I realized that the two were working in tandem to make an indelible impression on me once again.

One allows: "No good deed goes unpunished."

The other maintains: "Your sins will find you out."

It seemed to me, as I concentrated on a timeframe in the life of the network, focusing on the middle of the 20th century and beyond, two of the key players in that mix could pass for Exhibit A in representing one or the other of those idioms that are so familiar to so many. That isn't to suggest that one was performing all right and the other was performing all wrong. But the proclivity was exhibited for leaning in one direction or the other.

Do opposites attract? My case study into the lives of these principals hinted that both were attracted to the same organization during the same epoch. While each one left a huge imprint on it, my suspicion is that there was room for improvement all the way around. At the same time, it seems to me that one of them used his talents wisely while the other might have been wiser.

I absolutely defer to the very real possibility that some readers may assign different values to those situations I cite. This is a case study about two individuals in executive leadership who, time has borne out, made an impact on an undertaking that consumed them. I'll share their stories and admit upfront that it's fine to disagree with me. It's one reporter's observations, and yours may be totally opposite.

A little background is in order to bring everybody up to speed.

The National Broadcasting Company was formed in 1926, largely at the hands of visionaries within its parent enterprise, the Radio Corporation of America. RCA itself had existed only seven years then, founded in 1919 by the General Electric Company. Without belaboring the intriguing histories of

those businesses' backgrounds, just as cream rises, there was a young man in place at that explicit juncture equipped with sufficient skill, intellect and ambition to grab the ball and do extraordinary things with it.

Progressively assuming greater responsibility in crafting America's first transcontinental broadcast web, David Sarnoff was just 38 on assuming the presidency of NBC in 1930. He would become so identified with the RCA ancillary that his name and NBC's were inexorably synonymous in the industry. While he ascended the corporate ladder to chairman of the RCA board in 1947, NBC—one of the smaller functions of that manufacturing and technological giant—was never far from his mind or his reach. He kept a hand in its decisions until retiring in 1970, a year before his death.

David Sarnoff isn't the subject of this study, however. He's introduced because he continued to be an overriding factor in the paramount decisions that were made at NBC.

While he eventually deferred to others to run the network's day-to-day operations, it was Sarnoff that CBS magnate William S. Paley enjoyed sparring with on a regular basis as he attempted to stay at least one move ahead of NBC. It was a personal as well as professional quest with both men as they repeatedly pursued a course of one-upmanship, trying to press ahead of the other, while sometimes gleefully embarrassing their opposite number in the process.

The key players of this inquiry are Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver and Robert Sarnoff, the latter a son of David Sarnoff. Both arrived at NBC in the late 1940s and traveled rapidly through the ranks of executive leadership before attaining the ultimate prize. What they did with their time there is the topic of this discussion.

Sylvester Laflin (Pat) Weaver, Jr. was the closest thing NBC witnessed to a true creative genius, undoubtedly so prior to the arrival of some inspired TV pacesetters in the final



David Sarnoff, radio inventor and founder of the Radio Corporation of America and its network, the National Broadcasting Company, dedicates the RCA Building at the New York World's Fair in 1939 in front of an NBC television camera.

decades of the 20th century. Born at Los Angeles on December 21, 1908, Weaver was responsible for programming moves in two mediums that often have been cited for novel brilliance. Reporting his death at 93, The New York Times dubbed him “the most important innovator in television programming.”

After getting into radio as an announcer following graduation magna cum laude from Dartmouth in 1930, he shifted between stations until landing a stint managing a San Francisco outlet. Weaver joined the Young & Rubicam advertising agency in 1935, subsequently managed advertising at the American Tobacco Company (Lucky Strike, Pall Mall, Herbert Tareyton, et al.), and served in the U. S. Navy 1942-1945. Following the war, he returned to Young & Rubicam as vice president for radio and television. In 1949, Weaver made the transition that was to establish him as an icon in American entertainment programming.

Joining NBC that year as vice president in charge of television, his creative instincts coupled with demonstrated ability thrust him into the president’s office in December 1953. In the interim, the boy wonder busied himself

launching several features that were to make indelible impressions on broadcasting. On his first day on the job in 1949, he rescinded a cancellation order for *Meet the Press*, airing on radio then and currently TV’s longest-running news forum. Joining the web at a time when TV sets were an uncommon opulence in American domiciles—with the trade run like radio as sponsors produced and controlled their own shows—Weaver argued successfully that national chains should produce the shows and sell commercial time to advertisers. (On that, he was in total accord with CBS mogul Paley.)

Weaver commissioned NBC spectaculars, 60-, 90- and 120- minute live specials like *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin and Gian Carlo Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the first opera custom-built for video. His wife, actress Elizabeth Inglis, termed him “a great idealist” viewing TV as a way to introduce the common man to culture. “He put on opera for the first time because he said the man in the street ... wants to hear anything and he doesn’t have the money,” she allowed. “His plan was that everybody should have access.”



Sylvester “Pat” Weaver

Weaver was credited with debuting a plethora of innovative projects for NBC-TV. Among his brainchildren were *Today*, *Tonight*, *Home*, *Wide World* and more. Two of his series, of course, persevere more than a half-century after their inception, offering no sign of fading while still mesmerizing audiences in large quantities every weekday.

For radio, he created the epic *Monitor*, an ambitious unstructured magazine classic that aired 40 hours every weekend at its start. It persisted for two decades (1955-1975) in abbreviated segments while some prophets claimed it “saved a network from extinction.” Whether it did or not is for conjecture, but it staved off the inevitable while attracting legions of fans and advertisers to NBC. Listeners were drawn by its immediacy, novelty and portability. Presenting snippets of mostly three minutes’ duration tops, its concept fit well into the growing impatience fans harbored for formulaic material while fitting precisely into the trendy lifestyles of Americans on the go. *Monitor*’s durability was a testament to Weaver’s ingenuity in establishing a method to inform, amuse and sustain with great diversity.

To keep things in their proper perspective, it should be noted that not every Weaver notion turned out as charmingly. The most colossal failure occurred on NBC Radio in 1955-1956. When Weaver and his protégés cleared NBC’s daytime schedule of nearly every longrunning soap opera, quiz, music and variety feature—disrupting the housewives’ loyalties to a pattern NBC had followed for decades—it found little favorable reception to a copycat version of *Monitor* bearing the soubriquet *Weekday*. A five-to six-hour daily magazine debuting on November 7, 1955, stemming from the phenomenal success of



Host Dave Garroway and Pat Weaver on the set of Weaver’s innovative television series *Today*.



Robert W. Sarnoff

Monitor, simply fell on deaf ears and was off the air in a matter of months. Then, with years of traditions now irretrievably broken, NBC found itself languishing in the cellar of discontent Monday through Friday during the sunlight hours. With its Weekday series a washout, millions permanently threw in the towel, having discovered other interests in the interim. The miscalculation was costly: it was turf NBC would never again dominate. Within weeks after Weekday's departure, Weaver followed suit.

According to newspaper accounts, "His greatest power over network programming came when Mr. Weaver was NBC's president, a job he was forced to relinquish in 1955 to Robert Sarnoff, the son of Gen. David Sarnoff, the head of RCA." Wrote another: "Mr. Weaver was pushed out as NBC president in 1955 by Robert Sarnoff, son of David Sarnoff—the head of NBC's parent corporation, RCA." Although Weaver was named NBC chairman on relinquishing the presidency and CEO post, he labored between two Sarnoffs—papa, chairman of parent RCA, and son, president and CEO of NBC. While Weaver continued to receive plaudits for his dazzling achievements (e.g. in April 1956, the Newspaper Guild Press Club cited him "for creating new programming ideas and methods for bringing new excitement into television," one of numerous honors), there were published rumors that he was not a happy camper.

At a board meeting about eight months after being kicked upstairs, on September 7, 1956, derision erupted when Weaver an-

nounced he couldn't abide by some aspects of projected management reorganization. To everyone's utter surprise, even though rumors had circulated for months, he suddenly resigned in protest. Within days more loyalists (one with 30 years' tenure at NBC) quit. Much of this exhibition, which NBC and RCA preferred to keep a lid on, spilled out onto the pages of the nation's newspapers. In the 1960s, Weaver joined Subscription Television, Inc., a pay cable TV venture that ultimately failed. He was a media consultant thereafter and died at 93 at Santa Barbara, California on March 15, 2002.

Robert W. Sarnoff, meanwhile, was the eldest of a half-dozen sons of David Sarnoff, the RCA chairman. When the younger Sarnoff was elected president of NBC and subsequently its chairman, of course the water cooler conversations in Rockefeller Center were abuzz with the inevitable whispers of favoritism and nepotism. Some branded him the "crown prince" and there was talk by naysayers of a "Sarnoff dynasty." But if one of his dad's biographers is to be believed, he earned the right to hold his offices through solid understudy and hard work, not purely ambition and kinship.

Born July 2, 1918 in New York City, Robert Sarnoff was equipped with a Harvard degree and a year of Columbia law school. He focused on broadcasting with the Coordinator of Information (later Office of Strategic Services) followed by a stint as a Naval communications officer during WWII. Joining Cowles Publishing afterward, he worked a year at one of its newspapers, *The Des Moines Register and Tribune*, before shifting to its *Look* magazine in New York.

Obviously restless, disenchanted with print media as a profession and—perhaps influenced by his father's forthrightness—in 1947, he decided television stood on the threshold of being the nation's chief news, amusement and advertising source. He also believed he should be identified with it. The younger Sarnoff discussed his beliefs with a chum, Frank Mullen, executive vice president

of NBC. In January 1948, Mullen hired him as an account executive (time salesman) at NBC. Though Sarnoff the elder supposedly conveyed unease, he didn't interfere in their arrangement.

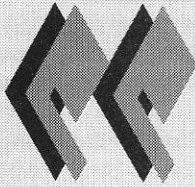
Some time later Sarnoff the younger transferred to TV network programming and production. His dad's deep passion of two decades had been to see video developed to overtake audio, and it was on the brink of doing so right then. Meanwhile, Robert Sarnoff's star rose quickly. Elevated to vice president over the NBC film unit in 1952, he was named executive vice president of the company the following year. By the end of 1955, he was NBC president. "The younger Sarnoff has inherited his father's zest for battle," said Jack Gould reporting Robert's ascension to the presidency. But Robert wasn't done by a long shot; by 1957, he was chairman where he held the same post his father held at parent RCA.

Elected president of RCA in 1965, Robert Sarnoff was named CEO two years afterward. When his ailing father retired from the chairmanship, in the wings was a Gentleman-in-Waiting who had been groomed for the post for more than two decades. As he stepped into that role in 1970, he may have anticipated a durable tenure befitting a Sarnoff. But he soon learned that life does not favor every man equally. In fact, by Sarnoff standards, Robert's occupancy was fairly brief.

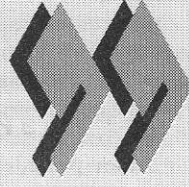
It coincided with some nasty economic reverses that soured any legacy he might have been credited with. Some of the disarray was laid directly at his feet. An ill-timed, ill-prepared folly into computers and abandonment of the pursuit in 1971 cost the company almost a half-billion dollars. Investors and directors took Robert Sarnoff to the woodshed for it. Hard times led the firm to curtail its quests into space activities to converge its energies on electronics. Meanwhile, Sarnoff carried the company into widespread diversification, allowing it to invest heavily in domains far from its core business such as publishing (Random House), vehicle renting (Hertz), chicken



Title card from *Victory at Sea* credits Robert Sarnoff as "coordinator" even though he was creator and supervisor of the award-winning series. Sarnoff extended his compilation format into additional award-winning documentary specials under the omnibus title of *Project Twenty*.



An ill-timed, ill-prepared folly into computers and abandonment of the pursuit in 1971 cost the company almost a half-billion dollars. Investors and directors took Robert Sarnoff to the woodshed for it.



farming (Banquet Foods), carpet-making (Coronet) and greeting cards (Gibson). To some, it seemed reckless and irresponsible and he was criticized for it.

In that same timeframe, hoping to find some relief for the bottom line, Sarnoff shopped NBC Radio and its owned-and-operated radio stations, but was unsuccessful in securing a buyer for the package. Signaling trouble to the public, meanwhile, NBC canceled its two-decades-old *Monitor* in January 1975, and in rapid succession, offered continuous news feeds starting in June 1975 (News and Information Service) for 55 minutes 24-7 to any station that subscribed, including non-affiliates. Few did, however, and that dismal failure was to be rescinded in less than two years. All of it portended bad tidings and must have appeared to industry watchers as cries of desperation.

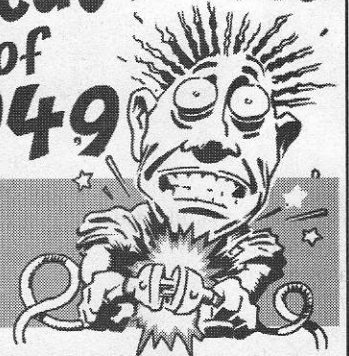
In an attempt to turn the situation around and put a positive spin on their intents, nev-

ertheless, the RCA directors abruptly fired David Sarnoff in late 1975. Perhaps a blessing was that his father didn't live to see it, nor most of the debacle that befell the mighty corporation he gave his life to; he died in 1971. After 49 years, a Sarnoff was no longer involved in steering NBC or its parent organization. The year 1975 marked the passing of a torch. Robert Sarnoff lived to be 78 and died in New York February 22, 1997 after battling cancer 16 years.

Both left their ultimate posts, in this reporter's observation, sorrowing. Both left under a cloud. One, on the surface, made a personal choice to depart; the other had none. But it seemed to me, neither did either one.

One, it also appeared, was punished for his good deeds while the other's poor choices brought him little good. Borrowing from yet another axiom, was it perhaps "the best of times and the worst of times"? ☹

The Great Fiasco of 1949



It's the well-known blooper from March 17, 1949 with Van Johnson and Ed Gardner from the Shamrock Hotel in Houston. During the first part of the broadcast an open telephone in the engineer's booth is carried on the air instead of the line connected to the remote studio. The show can be heard coming through the speakers in the booth and a network engineer tries in vain several times to improve the sound by adjusting equalization. Even after the error is rectified the crowd cannot hear the broadcast and some 1600 people can be heard milling about and talking. Ed Gardner, believing NBC must have taken the show off the air, refuses to follow the script. There are moments when the network takes the show off the air temporarily but offending profanities are accidentally broadcast.

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**In
The
Mail**

The Readers Have Their Say



Which George Slept Here?

In the last issue of *Radiogram*, page 3, the article is about Gracie Allen searching for her missing brother, George Allen. That name is very similar (identical?) to someone named George W. Allen. He is listed/credited as the director/producer of many (if not all) *The Whistler* programs sponsored by Signal Oil Company (of San Francisco).

This perplexes me no end. The *Radiogram* article describes Gracie's brother, George Allen, as an accountant working for Standard Oil Co. in San Francisco. Were there two different individuals with almost identical names residing in San Francisco and with disparate occupations although they both have connections with oil companies?

Anthony Chan
Monterey Park, CA

The Mysterious Traveler replies: The director-producer George W. Allen was not Gracie's brother. Her brother was named George Lyford Allen. But here's a further curiosity: Gracie Allen's father was named George W. Allen (I don't know what the "W" stands for in either man.) But Gracie's father died in 1931 and was not the director/producer George W. Allen of "Whistler" fame.

**George Putnam, 94, Dies;
Voice was 'Greatest in Radio'**

George Putnam, whose rich baritone voice was once described by Walter Winchell as "the greatest in radio," died September 12 of a kidney ailment in Chino Valley, CA. He was 94.

Putnam began his career at age 20 on a 1000-watt radio station in Minneapolis. By the late 1930s he had moved to NBC in New York where his professional stock rose considerably after Walter Winchell's praise.

"Winchell made my career," Putnam once said. "I went from \$190 a month at NBC to better than \$200,000 a year."

During the World War II Putnam was commissioned in the Marine Corps and he worked for Armed Forces Radio Service.

In 1948 he was hired by the Dumont television network to write and deliver six commentaries a week on a news show broadcast from New York. He also added to his professional presence by sharing the role of narrator with Lowell Thomas for Fox Movietone News.

But it was his move to KTTV, an independent station in Los Angeles that Putnam made his biggest mark. At one time he was the highest-rated and highest-paid TV anchor in Los Angeles. In fact his popularity was so high that his stentorian voice was said to be the inspiration for the Ted Baxter character in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

Putnam is perhaps best known for his One Reporter's Opinion in which he was frequently criticized for blurring the roles of a reporter and commentator. His opinions were conservative but he never saw himself as such, he told an interviewer in 1994. "I detest labels," Putnam said. "I went through the Depression, and my father was reduced to selling peanuts door-to-door. ... I've been a lifelong democrat. I'm a conservative democrat."



Advice from a President

Former president Bill Clinton, commenting to the news media the week of Sept. 22, when asked about the Republicans' vice presidential pick, responded:

"My view is, why say, ever, anything bad about a person? Why don't we like them and celebrate them and be happy for her elevation to the ticket? And just say that she was a good choice for him and we disagree with them?"

I love the sentiment there! Without turning this into a political preference, I thought about that a while. Do you suppose it would work in vintage radio clubs, too?

Jim Cox
e-mail

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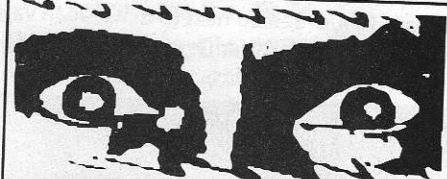
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TED OSBORNE in familiar territory as Tom Agnew, director and announcer of the "Crime Club," in the 1940 film *Charlie Chan at the Wax Museum* with Sidney Toler. Osborne was primarily a radio actor appearing in diverse fare including *Blackstone the Magician*, *The Cinnamon Bear*, *Dr. Kildare* and *X Minus One*. Perhaps he is best known as "the man in black" host of *Suspense* in the late 1940s. Seated next to him is Joan Valerie as the sinister assistant to the wax museum curator, and behind them is engineer Edwards, played by Harold Goodwin. Osborne was billed as "Osborn" in the credits.



TRUMAN BRADLEY as the sinister Captain Kane, skipper of the *Suva Star*, in the 1941 Charlie Chan film *Dead Men Tell* with Sidney Toler. Bradley was a perfect red herring as a sailor seeking revenge on the man who left him to die on an island. With his rich bass voice, he was a longtime announcer in various radio series including *Burns and Allen*, *The Dinah Shore Show*, *The Frank Sinatra Show*, *Jack Armstrong* and *The Red Skelton Show*. Bradley was also the announcer on *Suspense* at the time that Ted Osborne was "the Man in Black." Bradley was also the host and narrator of the 1950s television series *Science Fiction Theatre*, produced by Ziv Television Programs.



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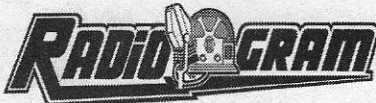
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