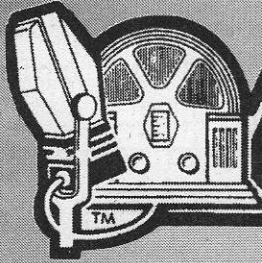


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# RADIOGRAM

Vol. 34 • No. 2

January 2009



## THE SAGA OF THE SIX

## SHOOTER



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Volume 34 • Number 2 • January 2009



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**PATRICK LUCANIO**

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Happy New Year! We celebrate 2009 with "out with the new and in with the old." Below is a column by radio critic John Crosby from 60 years ago this month, January 31, 1949, a transitional year for radio as . . .

# The Radio Stars Look at Television

The entertainers here are growing increasingly restive. Next to taxes—easily the most popular topic—television and the Columbia Broadcasting System's raids on the other networks hold the center of the stage. (Actually, I suppose weather leads all other topics, but, as far as I can see, weather is discussed almost constantly in California).

Jack Benny took up both topics the other morning over breakfast.

"Gosh, all that fuss," he said. "A man moves from one network to another and the whole industry in an uproar. I didn't think I was that important." Benny still thinks the capital gains deal may be approved and, even if it isn't, he still stands to profit heavily.

"At first I was a little afraid of television because we couldn't dot he sort of things we do so well in radio."

Benny's recent show in which he and Ronald Colman changed places in a dream sequence he considers one of the six best he ever did, a proposition I won't argue. It probably is. However, he pointed out that much of this show is pure radio which couldn't be converted to television.

There is a sequence where Benny walks over to Colman's house to borrow a cup of flour. Foot-falls. Suddenly a clink of a coin in the cup.

"Thank you," says Benny.

That sort of gag, in which the Benny show specializes, is pure radio.

"But then I remember that television is the same old thing I used to do in vaudeville."

Benny thinks he could handle a variety act on television that would compete in popularity with his radio show.

"Or it might be a one-act play with sets. I'd live in a small but nice home and the Colmans would live next door in a big fancy one."

However neither Benny nor many of the other top radio stars appear to be taking television very seriously yet.

Edgar Bergen has departed to New York to look over local television there and make up his mind what he wants to do next year. Bergen, one of the more thoughtful members of radio's comedy circle, thinks that radio had made two mistakes that television shouldn't.

First he feels that radio, centered as it is in New York and Hollywood, has lost touch with the rest of the country and should get out to the people more.

Second, he sees no real reason why an entertainer be required to produce a new show once a week. Why not once a month, Bergen asks.

The point of view could spread easily, with taxes the way they are. Bergen figures his present four month vacation from radio will cost him about eight dollars. In the light of present taxes an entertainer could hang on

to as much money working once a month as he could once a week at the same salary.

"Y'know," Al Jolson confided out at Santa Anita. "I made \$2,000,000 (from *The Jolson Story*), I got eight cents left."

Jolson currently earns \$7,500 a week from his radio show and manages to hang up about \$500 after taxes and expenses.

A surprising number of radio and film names owe the government money for last year's taxes, which means they have to work harder this year to earn more money to pay last year's taxes. And that means they'll have to work even harder next year to pay this year's taxes.

Jolson feels an old-time minstrel show with an all-star cast in blackface would be tremendous television.

"There's a million jokes—all of 'em bad. But people will laugh at 'em when you put 'em in blackface. If I were only 35 years old . . ."

He's still full of astonishing vigor for a man who admits to 60 years. (There are grounds for suspicion that is 64 is closer).

At Santa Anita, where his box is next to that of Harry James and Betty Grable, he bounds through the Turf Club as if he owned it. As a matter of fact he did own part of it once. He was one of the original investors in Santa Anita though he since has sold his shares for 10 times their original value.

A shrewd investor, Mr. J., which is one reason why he is still one of Hollywood's wealthiest citizens.

He is a highly-respected horse player in this community and, of course, incredibly gifted at taking a horse home.

In fact there is reason to believe the only voice the horse actually hears through the tumult of 70,000 people in the stretch drive is the booming consonantless roar of Al Jolson.

Jolson, incidentally, has just won a spirited argument with the National broadcasting Co. over putting his broadcast on tape. NBC, which had held out for years against transcription, has surrendered completely in this regard.

Jolson favors transcription because, as he confesses, he isn't much of a musician and he occasionally hits a clinker. Tape recording would permit him to edit his own songs.

"Right now," he roars, "I'm at the mercy of a guy with a knob."

He harbors the suspicion that the guy with the knob frequently does him dirt.

"I hear it later an' I say to myself, Al, you couldn't have been that bad."

Another man who is falling on tape with delighted cries is Ed Gardner, the Archie of *Duffy's Tavern*.

Gardner would like to record three or four shows ahead and then take off for Paris, a city he discovered all by himself last summer. He can't wait to get back. ♣

# PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR MAY OTR CONVENTION

by **JERRY WILLIAMS**  
CONVENTION CO-CHAIR

If you attended last years SPERDVAC convention you are aware of how spectacular an event it was, and how wonderful that about 90 honorary members attended. Well this one is shaping up to be another blockbuster convention for you. We have George Burns and Gracie Allen coming to visit along with Jack Benny, Gildersleeve, Bobby Benson and more to come.

Last May we did the Gildersleeve show where Gildy found himself engaged to two ladies. This year we will be doing the show that was a follow-up to that one.

With the talents of Chuck McCann, Janet Waldo, Shirley Mitchell, Eddie Carroll, Fred Travalena, Gloria McMillan, Ron Cocking, Tommy Cook, Ivan Curry, Gary Owens, Stuffy Singer, Jan Merlin, Dena Dietrich, Frank Bresee, Jim Harmon, Dick Beals and more, this should be a memorable weekend.

Entertainment that we are working on

## Irving Brecher dies; created 'Life of Riley'

Celebrated comedy writer Irving Brecher died November 17 at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles following several heart attacks. He was 94.



In 1944, Brecher created and produced a series for his friend Groucho Marx called *The Flotsam Family*.

The series, however, failed at audition after the would-be sponsor had trouble accepting Groucho as a blue-collar family man. Undaunted, Brecher, after seeing the film *The McGuerins of Brooklyn* that featured William Bendix as a blue-collar worker, tried again with *The Life of Riley* with Bendix in the lead. The series was an immediate hit and remained on radio through 1951 and then moved to television for an eight-year run.

Brecher was born in the Bronx where while in high school he began sending one-liners on penny postcards to columnists Walter Winchell and Ed Sullivan with some of them appearing in print. This led Brecher and his friend Al Schwartz to placing a small ad in *Variety* offering gag-writing services to vaudeville comedians. Brecher recalled that their first customer was Milton Berle, who page \$50 for

*Continued Page 14*



A special visit by George Burns and Gracie Allen is set for SPERDVAC's 2009 convention at the Beverly Garland Holiday Inn in North Hollywood May 1, 2 and 3. Registration forms are on page 7. Convention rates deadline is April 15 so don't delay.

include a Rudy Vallee Panel with Eleanor Vallee and others; talk radio with Ray Briem and guests; the 75th anniversary of *Lux Radio Theatre*; radio singers hosted by Chuck Southcott; and Gregg Oppenheimer's radio bloopers. Other panels we are exploring include the 70th anniversary of *I Love A Mystery* and the 60th anniversary of *Dragnet*.

We look forward to seeing you for another wonderful weekend. A reservation form is found on page seven and has all the information you need. As reservations are received, dinner table assignments will be given on a first come first served basis. Last year Friday and Saturday were sold out so get your reservations in early. Any questions please call or e-mail Jerry Williams at 530-990-4231 or [mrj1313@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mrj1313@sbcglobal.net).

The 2009 convention will be held May 1, 2, and 3 at the Beverly Garland Holiday Inn on Vineland in North Hollywood. Volunteers are needed, and if you can help out in any way please contact me. A specific list of volunteer positions is found on this page.

We'll see you at Convention 2009!

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

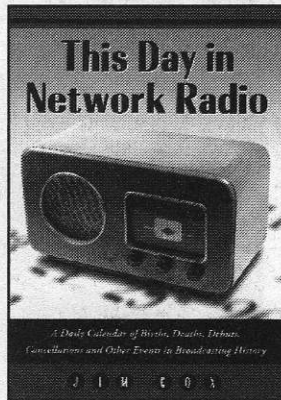
Whether or not you plan to attend, if you would like to volunteer a few hours of your time at the 2009 Convention we would love to have you. Below is a list of areas and duties involved:

- **VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR ASSISTANT.** Duties: monitor assigned volunteers.
- **PUBLICITY CHAIR.** Duties: send press releases; get interviews on radio and newspapers, etc.; send convention info to sperdvac website and other websites; OTR newsletters and OTR shows.
- **RAFFLE/SILENT AUCTION COORDINATOR.** Duties: get prizes; set up display tables; get volunteers to sell tickets at banquet and help distribute prizes.
- **DRIVERS.** Duties: pick-up and deliver honorary members at the airport or their homes.
- **RESERVATION/CHECK-IN TABLE.** Duties: hand out reservation packets; check-in non-reservation attendees.
- **DEALERS ROOM COORDINATOR ASSISTANT.** Duties: periodically monitor dealers room.
- **SPERDVAC TABLE IN DEALERS ROOM.** Duties: work the SPERDVAC sale and information table.
- **PANEL ROOM.** Duties: assist engineer; see that guests are seated; see that water is available; adjust guest microphones as needed; control audience microphone; help engineer haul, set up and break down equipment before and at end of panel day as needed.
- **PHOTOGRAPHER.** Duties: take snap shots of guests and room activities during panels and rehearsals.
- **VIDEO CAMERA PHOTOGRAPHERS.** Duties: film panel shows, rehearsals and recreations.

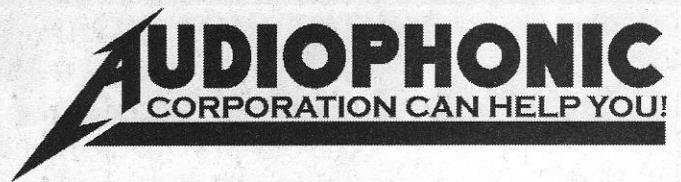
Please e-mail Jerry & Barbara Williams at [mrj1313@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mrj1313@sbcglobal.net) and let us know what you would be interested in.

## New book allows readers to pick a date in radio history

The seemingly indefatigable researcher-writer Jim Cox has done it again by offering a unique work that details events that have significantly affected American network radio since the mid-1920s. *This Day in Network Radio* is a 259-page record of the occasions, practices, or decisions that left indelible marks on broadcasting for each day of the calendar. Jim notes the debuts and cancellations of programs and the births and death of important people in radio history—not only headliners but also less recognized individuals. Included are recognizable radio executives and producers, writers and performers to lesser known but no less significant writers, sound technicians, engineers, consultants, and hawkers.



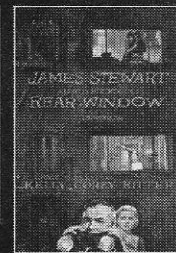
An October 25 sampling shows that *Al Pearce and His Gang* was cancelled in 1947 after debuting in 1934. Announcer and quizmaster John Reed King was born in 1914 as was writer and director Al (Albert) Lewis in 1912. Lewis was the “director-chief scribe” of *Our Miss Brooks*. Also on October 25 Cecil B. Brown (1987), Morton Downey (1985), Bob Murphy (1959) and Vincent Price (1993) all died. Having problems remembering Brown and Murphy? Just consult the index and it’ll take you to their birth dates for succinct bios.



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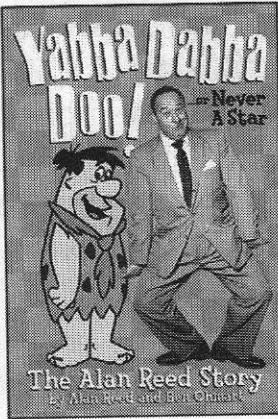


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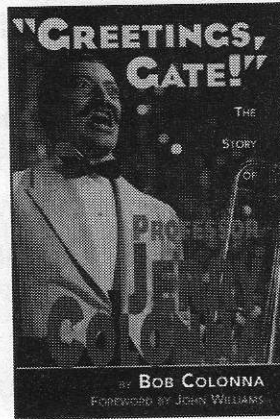
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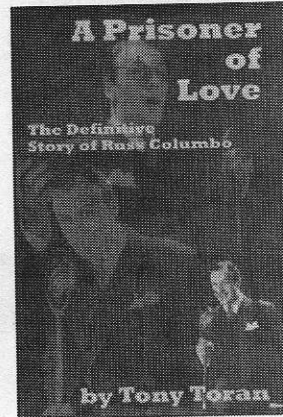
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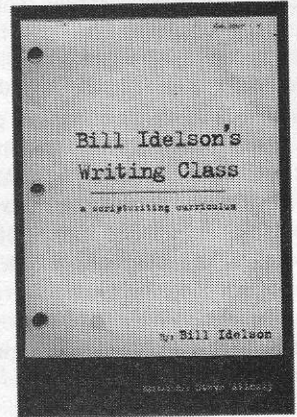
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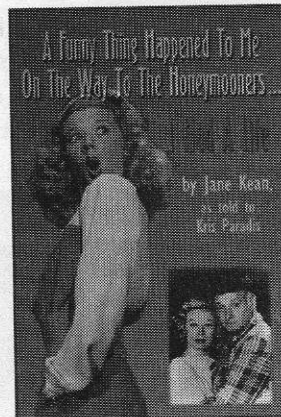
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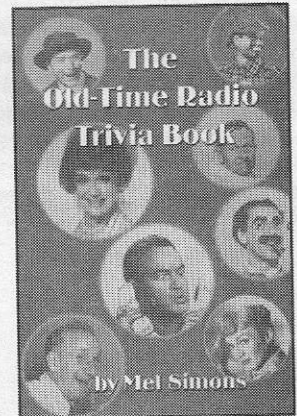
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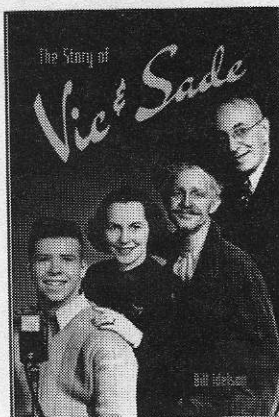
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## 2009 SPERDVAC OLD-TIME RADIO CONVENTION

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### RESERVATION FORM

Cancellation Deadline is April 22, 2009

Name \_\_\_\_\_  Non Member  Member # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Guest name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: If you wish to be seated with your friends, please send reservation forms and fees together. Convention tickets will be held at the Registration Desk. This is not a fundraiser and the full cost of tickets goes to cover costs. Therefore no part of the ticket price is considered a tax deductible contribution.

CONVENTION RATES DEADLINE APRIL 15, 2009. CHECKS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THIS DATE FOR DISCOUNTED PRICE. AFTER APRIL 15, 2009 TOTAL COST: \$175 (DAILY COSTS REMAIN THE SAME)

(Prices are per person; "Member" price applies to a member & guests on the same order form)

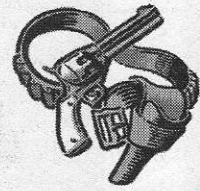
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| 1. Discounted Convention Package                                   | \$140 Member / \$150 Non Member | x | = |  |
| 2. Friday Daytime  | \$10 All Attendees              | x | = |  |
| 3. Friday evening dinner & program                                 | \$50 Member / \$ 55 Non Member  | x | = |  |
| 4. Saturday daytime  | \$20 All Attendees              | x | = |  |
| 5. Saturday evening dinner & program                               | \$50 Member / \$ 55 Non Member  | x | = |  |
| 6. Sunday Brunch & program   | \$35 All Attendees              | x | = |  |
| (Optional) Tax-Deductible Donation to Help Defray Convention Costs |                                 |   | = |  |
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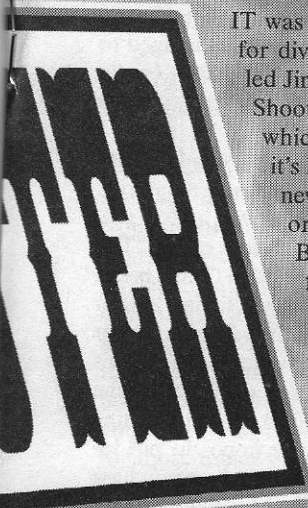
# SIX SHOOT

by  
Glenn Mosley

**IN** the early 1950s, Jimmy Stewart's film career was going gangbusters, but he didn't always feel right about some of the characters he'd been playing. Specifically, he wanted his characters to be tough but vulnerable. He felt as if the characters he was portraying in a series of memorable westerns with director Anthony Mann were, in the words of Stewart biographer Donald Dewey, "emotionally uncompromising." Dewey wrote that Stewart's "screen figures might have remained vulnerable in their toughness, but . . . the vulnerability was getting less and less screen time."

The films were and are marvelous—*Winchester '73*, *Bend of the River*, and *The Man from Laramie*, among others. But during this stretch Stewart was also branching out with roles in films like *The Glenn Miller Story*.





IT was this performer's need for diversity in his roles that led Jimmy Stewart to *The Six Shooter*, a radio series role which fit him so perfectly it's hard to believe Stewart never played the character on the big screen. And Britt Ponset, a folksy frontier drifter and cowboy, was a diametric opposite to many of the characters Stewart was playing in films—Ponset preferred to settle differences without firing a shot.

Stewart was a wonderful radio actor. Though this would be his first series as a continuing star, he had performed in episodes of *Suspense* and other radio series of the day in both original stories and in radio adaptations of his films.

In many ways, the premiere of *The Six Shooter* in 1953 was an attempt by a radio network—in this case NBC—to revive audience interest in radio drama. Certainly, some radio dramas were successful right into the early 1960s—*Gunsmoke*, for one. But the writing was on the wall: radio was changing, and television was well on its way to taking over dramatic entertainment programming.

NBC tried to compensate by hiring a major Hollywood star, hoping the show would catch on. It didn't, but the lack of ratings success for *The Six Shooter* was more an indicator of the changing tide in the broadcast industry than of the quality of the program. *The Six Shooter* featured well written scripts, many with a sense of humor and a gentle touch, fine special effects, and outstanding performances by Jimmy Stewart.

The first time Stewart played Britt Ponset was actually much earlier, on an April 13, 1952 broadcast of the *Hollywood Star Playhouse*. Stewart first appeared on the scene with this voice-over:

I hadn't figured on going through Clay City. It was an hour out of my way and I was already a day late to the Jefferson ranch where I'd signed on for the roundup, but when Scar started limp-

ing from a loose shoe, I dinna have no choice. We had to head for the nearest blacksmith shop, so we turned north.

Ponset teamed up with the local sheriff, played by actor William Conrad, who would go on, of course to play Matt Dillon on the radio version of *Gunsmoke*, to solve a murder and absolve the sheriff's son of any wrongdoing.

The pilot episode was eventually used as a demonstration episode in the summer of 1953, with Stewart appearing out of character during the commercial breaks and speaking to potential advertisers and listeners in an attempt to sell the series:

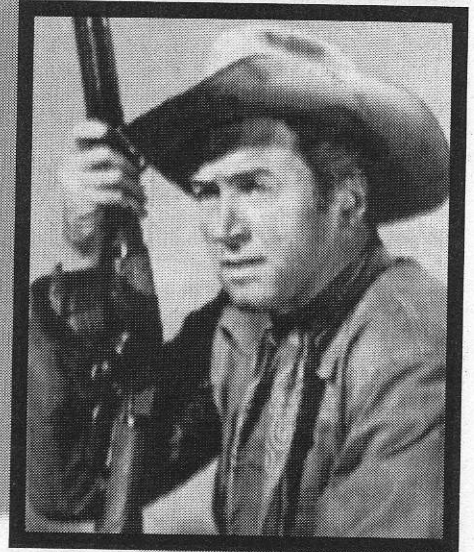
I've made several stories of this kind for pictures—that is, honest, legitimate stories of the west. And I hope that this series can offer you the same type of entertainment...we think it's the sort of program the whole family will enjoy...we think that the character of Britt Ponset typifies some of the greatness that built America.

The series itself premiered September 20, 1953, and with one major exception, the style established in the pilot and demonstration episode was maintained throughout the series' one-year run. Stewart's narration was to become a hallmark of the series. The tone was more folksy melodrama than action-adventure, and while the slow-talking Ponset was fast on the draw and could shoot himself out of trouble, he tried to be a gentleman and help people solve their problems without firing a shot.

The one major change between the demonstration episode and the series itself was in the opening narration. The now famous opening to the series is heard this way:

The man in the saddle is angular and long-legged. His skin is sun-dyed brown. The gun in his holster is gray steel and rainbow mother-of-pearl, its handle unmarked. People call them both "The Six Shooter."

Initially, the program's open had said, "The gun in his holster is gray steel and rainbow mother-of-pearl, the handle unmarked. But the gun has killed and the man has killed. People call them both "The Six Shooter.'" Clearly, Stewart and the series producers wanted a different focus.



James Stewart with another weapon of choice in the film *Winchester '73*.

Ponset's adventures were different from other radio westerns and Stewart's big screen westerns—they leaned more toward comedy and humor, and ranged far beyond typical shoot-em-ups. Ponset fell in love in the series' final episode, was elected as a write-in candidate mayor and sheriff of a town at the same time, judged a county fair contest, and even played with a road company of actors. One story was a western version of *Cinderella*, and another featured Ponset telling a young runaway the story of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with a few changes:

Ponset: He was a real skin flint, he was just as stingy as they come. His name was, uh....let me see...Eben, somethin' like that.... Well, being so tight-fisted, this fella Eben, he, he got to be the richest man in the whole territory.

Boy: Did he own a ranch?

Ponset: Oh, sure, sure. Had four of 'em. Four ranches, and store buildings, and farms, maybe a bank or two.

Unfortunately, it all came a little too late. The days of radio drama were fading, as Stewart himself recognized. In fact, Stewart's one-year run in this western was typical of the fortunes found by other major Hollywood stars trying radio at the time. Alan Ladd's *Box 13*, Glenn Ford's *The Adventures of Christopher London*, and Humphrey Bogart's *Bold Venture* had all met with limited success in the late 1940s and early 1950s, despite the high quality of the programs.

But the lack of commercial success for *The Six Shooter* did nothing to dampen its overall quality—it was a top-drawer production all the way. *The Six Shooter* was produced with Revue Productions, with Jack Johnstone producing and directing, Basil Adlam composing music, and Frank Burt providing scripts. Some of the finest performers in the history of radio

THE GREATNESS, THE GLORY, THE FURY OF THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER!



Universal-International presents

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ARTHUR KENNEDY  
JULIA ADAMS  
ROCK HUDSON

BEND OF THE RIVER

COLOR BY  
TECHNICOLOR



with LORI NELSON • JAY C. FLIPPEN • STEPIN' FETCHIT  
Screenplay by BORDEN CHASE • Directed by ANTHONY MANN • Produced by AARON ROSENBERG

Ad Mat No. 106  
100 Lines—7" x 1 Col.

Newspaper ad mat for one of James Stewart's many westerns for Universal-International and director Anthony Mann that led to radio's *The Six Shooter*.

But even without its first star, the concept for *The Six Shooter* made one other appearance. Radio's *The Six Shooter* became television's *The Restless Gun*, which aired from 1957 through 1959, and starred John Payne.

graced the episodes—Howard McNear, Virginia Gregg, Parley Baer, Harry Bartell, and Jeannette Nolan, just to name a few.

It was that quality which led Stewart to purchase the rights to a few of the stories, and he carried them into television following the cancellation of *The Six Shooter* in 1954. On February 10, 1957, Stewart played Britt Ponset once again, on an episode of *General Electric Theater* titled "The Town with a Past." The episode was adapted from the "Silver Annie" episode of *The Six Shooter*, and reteamed Stewart with Beulah Bondi, his frequent co-star from films such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

Two other Frank Burt scripts from the radio series also made it to television with Stewart. "Brit Ponset's Christmas Carol," adapted from the Dickens classic, played on *General Electric Theater* as "Trail to Christmas." Stewart directed the program and also played the lead character (here named Bart, not Brit). "Trail to Christmas" was broadcast on December 15, 1957. Two years later, in December, 1959, Stewart starred in a *Lincoln Mercury Startime* episode titled "Cindy's Fella," which had been produced for the radio series as "When the Shoe Doesn't Fit." This time, Brit Ponset became Azel Dorsey, a peddler.

Certainly, Stewart wasn't about to commit to a television version of the series in those years though he would years later try his hand at a pair of television shows, *The Jimmy Stewart Show* and *Hawkins*, a forerunner to Andy Griffith's *Matlock*. But even without its first star, the concept for *The Six Shooter* made one other appearance. Radio's *The Six Shooter* became television's *The Restless Gun*, which aired from 1957 through 1959, and starred John Payne.

Payne played Britt Ponset in the series

pilot, called "The Restless Gun," on *The Schlitz Playhouse of Stars* on March 29, 1957. The story was based on one of the radio episodes, "Red Lawson's Revenge," written by Les Crutchfield. When the pilot went to series, the character's name was changed to Vint Bonner. Still, many of Frank Burt's radio scripts were adapted in the first season of *The Restless Gun*.

The bridge music used in the radio series made other appearances in Stewart material. For example, it can be heard in a 1955 episode of *General Electric Theater* called "The Windmill." The script by Borden Chase, based on a story by famous western fiction author Ernest Haycox, featured Stewart as a former gunfighter who has hidden the truth about his former life from his children and friends in the community. He is forced to enter a shooting contest to raise money he hopes to put toward the purchase

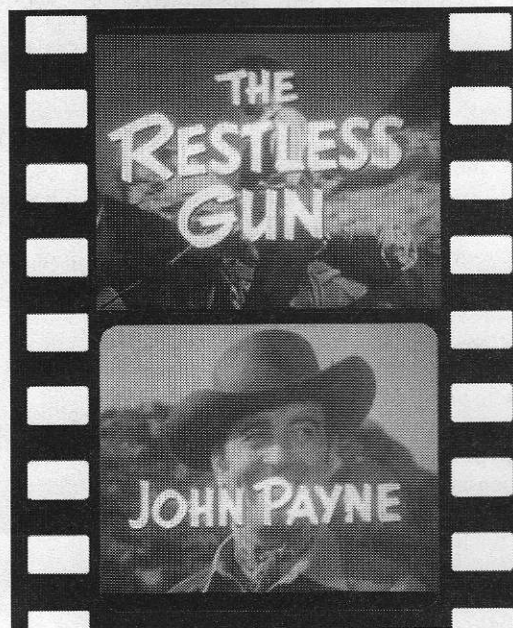
of a windmill for his family farm. The episode has a very "Six Shooterish" feel, as the gunfighter turned farmer and father throws the shooting match to protect his secret.

The music is also heard in the *General Electric Theater* episode "The Town with a Past."

*The Six Shooter* was hardly one of radio drama's great commercial success stories, but it was a wonderfully entertaining program, and its stories and con-

cepts went on to touch no fewer than three other television series.

Fortunately for fans of Jimmy Stewart, westerns, and old-time radio, it is still widely available today. And in this day and age when Hollywood films are often based on old radio and television programs, maybe Brit Ponset will reappear. Think about it—Tom Selleck, or Bill Pullman or even Tom Hanks as Brit Ponset, riding the range again, angular and long legged. 🐾



*The Six Shooter* moved to television in 1957 as *The Restless Gun* with John Payne.



# BOOKMARKS

## Second Time Around for 2-Volume Tome but 'revised, expanded and corrected' leaves much to be desired

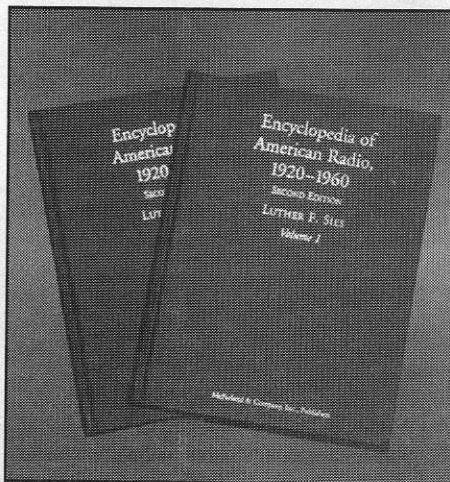
by jim Cox

**T**HERE is often something as comfortable as an old shoe about previously published works that are being released a second time.

For one, those who are familiar with them from an earlier life (the life of the work, not yours!) have a pretty good idea of what to anticipate, and thereby a common grasp of expectations it will satisfy. Another favorable assumption from the reader's perspective is that "hey, this text performed well enough in its original rendering that the publishers have ample confidence to bring it out again." And for those tomes that have been updated before their re-release, that may supply enough incentive to induce still more buyers to look at it anew—perhaps even including some who procured the earlier offering.

McFarland and Company is currently re-issuing several works that have proven sound in earlier lives. And for a handful of those, there is some added treatment that portends a plus for buyers now. One of those billed as "revised, expanded and corrected" is Luther F. Sies' *Encyclopedia of American Radio, 1920-1960*, now in a second two-volume edition. The original 904-page 8-3/4"x11-3/8" book with 28,848 entries was published in one volume. The new work, with similar dimensions, boasts 1,144 pages in combined volumes and includes 35,976 entries or 7,128—about 25 percent—more than the original. Is there documentation in any current format with that much old time radio history in one collection? None comes to mind, suggesting Sies has mined a heap of sources to pull this together.

In an obvious attempt to be straightforward with his readers Sies states at least twice that "even in its second edition the book is far from complete." He confesses: "It remains only a representative sample of broadcasters' work from 1920 to 1960." Despite the disclaimer, what is utterly captivating about his research is the depth to which he addresses tens of thousands of obscure radio performers in out-of-the-way places. While most hail from rural America, they represent small stations in nondescript hamlets from one end of the country to the other. Sies has ferreted out their names and contributions and posted



them in a lasting record. That is very likely his greatest realization for nobody has given the small time crowd the notice that he has.

He furthermore focuses on the transcontinental networks, including programming and personalities, although his contributions here are weaker. While readers are fortunate to find some details and anecdotes on a given show or genre that they might have to poke through a half-dozen texts to find otherwise, it's still often distressingly incomplete.

Regrettably, there are also errors. In addition to some misspelled words, more troubling is a surfeit of incorrect dates which are easily found. After encountering a proliferation, one wonders if the author is too cavalier. A few examples: At least twice October 19, 1952 is cited as the date entertainer Arthur Godfrey fired singer Julius LaRosa on a live broadcast of Arthur Godfrey Time. It happened October 19, 1953. He notes "*Beulah's* last revival on CBS in the mid-1950s was in a fifteen minute format with Hattie McDaniel in the title role." There wasn't a mid-1950s revival—*Beulah's* quarter-hour exposition aired 1947-54. On October 26, 1951, Hattie McDaniel died, succeeded by Lillian Randolph then Amanda Randolph. *The Voice of Firestone's* initial broadcast is depicted as December 24, 1928. but it was December 3, 1928. *Presenting Wendy Warren and the News*, the text outlines the drama's plot for one episode, June 13, 1947. But that couldn't be; the narrative didn't premiere for two more weeks.

In reference to *Ma Perkins*, a serial persisting from 1933-60, the book observes: "Oxydol sponsored the show for its entire broadcast." In November 1956, four years before *Ma Perkins* was canceled, Oxydol soapmaker P&G withdrew. The fact that all of these errors appear in the original 2000 publication intimates advertised "revised, expanded and corrected" hype is suspect. What difference does it make? To the novice OTR reader, possibly little; but to all who give serious thought to precision, including hobbyists, historians and researchers, it's disturbing as one considers the rest of this mammoth project.

In a work so large you might expect some bonus rounds and Sies doesn't disappoint. An appendix contains a comprehensive chronology of radio from 1906-60. A second appendix lists names of thousands of performers although there is nothing more—no biographical or career details which would be helpful.

The two-volume set of *Encyclopedia of American Radio, 1920-1960, Second Edition*, by Luther F. Sies, sells for \$195.00. It may be ordered now from [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com) or 800-253-2187.♦

Turn page for additional book review:  
*Reagan: The Hollywood Years* by Marc Eliot;  
reviewed by Thomas DeLong.

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Our special Bud Abbott and Lou Costello presentation recorded live November 10, 1991 with guests Bud Abbott, Jr., Vicki Abbott Wheeler and Chris Costello. This is side two of reel 1407 in our General Library. Side one is the Saturday evening banquet with re-creation of *Archie Andrews* with Bob Hastings and Harlan Stone in their original roles as Archie and Jughead.

**spervac**



## Reagan: The Hollywood Years

# Radio Groundwork Led to Reagan's Acting and Political Careers

by Thomas DeLong

**R**EAGANITES of varying backgrounds and persuasions need to be reminded that the groundwork of his acting and political careers was radio. Known as the Great Communicator on the campaign trail and in the White house, Ronald Reagan and his pre-gubernatorial and presidential years is the subject of *Reagan: The Hollywood Years* by Marc Eliot, biographer of Jimmy Stewart, Cary Grant and Walt Disney, and published by Harmony Books. Now with Reagan as his subject Eliot focuses on an area that has been generally and not surprisngly overlooked—broadcasting.

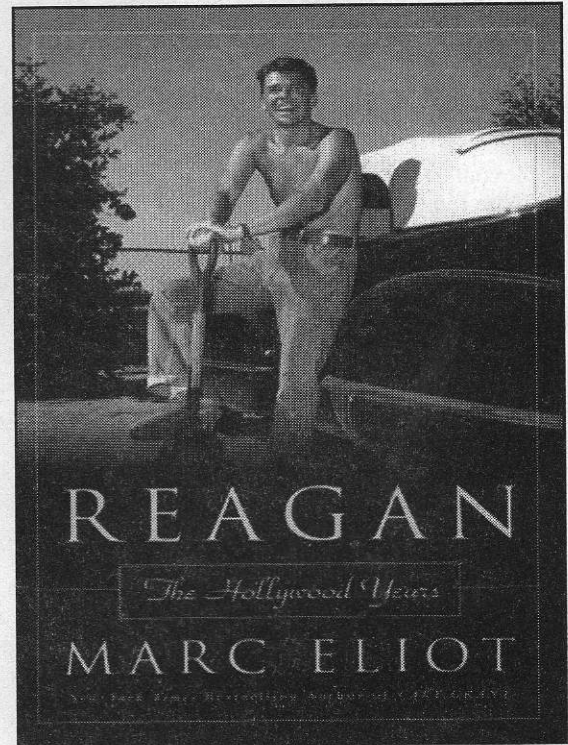
The future President of the United States graduated from Eureka College in 1932 where he had a heavy load of extracurricular activities, ranging from football and cheerleading to campus newspaper reporting and dramatic club productions. Aiming for radio announcer, he faced rejection by Chicago's major outlet WGN. Undaunted he landed at a jack-of-all-trades job at WOC Davenport, IA. His coverage of sports sparked interest by sister station WHO Des Moines, soon to be a midwest affiliate of NBC. Often it was too expensive for WHO to send him to out-of-town football and basketball games. So Reagan verbalized play-by-play via telegraphic reports. "With his voice," Eliot writes, "he acted out rather than narrated the games, convincing listeners he was there. The confidence with which he learned to communicate gave his broadcasts a heightened sense of believability." His dramatic touch to such broadcasts was inspired by FDR's historic Fireside Chats.

At the same time Reagan longed for an opportunity to take a screen test. With the Chicago Cubs at spring training on Catalina, actress and friend Joy Hodges directed him toward her agent. Reagan's resonant acting voice impressed Warner Brothers, which offered a contract starting at a majestic Depression-era \$200 per week. His screen debut—as

a radio announcer in the B-picture *Love is in the Air* (1932)—gather good reviews in spite of his limited acting ability. Jack Warner gambled on his potential stardom, giving him a move up to a studio A production, albeit an insignificant part in Busby Berkeley's *Hollywood Hotel*—again as a radio announcer.

Although this 375-page biography's emphasis is on his 56 movies (to the end of his screen career RR struggled to maintain the level of the memorable 1942 performance in *King's Row*) and revelatory life in Hollywood, there are two well-researched chapters on his upbringing, college days, and radio work. They provide readers with the center of gravity from which he built the springboard to greater fame and leadership.

Author Eliot know *his* Hollywood. He presents an in-depth and captivating narrative with screenland sources not usually tapped.👊



## 2009

### MEETING SCHEDULE

|                 |                                    |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Jan. 10 .....   | Mid-Valley Library, North Hills    |
| Feb. 14 .....   | South Pasadena Community Room      |
| Mar. 14 .....   | Mid-Valley Library                 |
| May 1-2-3 ..... | Convention 2009 (B. Garland Hotel) |
| June 13 .....   | Mid-Valley Library                 |
| Sept. 12 .....  | So. Pasadena Comm. Room            |
| Oct. 10 .....   | Mid-Valley Library                 |
| Nov. 14 .....   | To Be Announced                    |

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60 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

# MR. BENNY'S REVENGE Or What Comedian Thinks of Critics

by John Crosby

In the anniversary issue of *Variety*, Jack Benny, the \$2,260,000 comedian, has broken a lance over the skulls of radio critics, an easy target and one that hardly justifies the expense—lances being pretty expensive these days. If you overlook the extravagance, though, Benny has a pretty good point and, since I've temporarily run short of lances of my own to break and comedians to break them against, I thought I'd turn the place over to Benny for the day. (Since columnists haven't as much space at their disposal as comedians, this had had to be drastically condensed). Take away, Benny.

by Jack Benny

The past several years I've noticed radio editors gang up on radio comedians and accuse them of using the same type of humor year after year. Reviewers admit the comedians have top comedy shows, and funny programs. Their beef is the programs always use the same characters and situations.

The battle cry seems to be, "The listeners want a change." But do they?

Amos and Andy were public favorites in 1929. They still are. Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, Fred Allen, Burns and Allen, have all ranked high in the Hoopers for a dozen years. These comics have spent years perfecting their individual comedy styles, and would be completely lost without them. Would the critics have George and Gracie darken their dialogue and Amos and Andy jump into domestic comedy? Bob Hope has a pace and brashness I envy. But I know that I'd be floundering in "flop-sweat" if I tried Bob's delivery. I do flatter myself into thinking that Hope can't get as much out of "well!!!" as I do.

### 17-YEAR TEST

It took 17 years to develop the characters on my show. Each week we've tried to inject a new situation, idea, or character into our script. What happens? A reviewer comes along, says the show was great, the audience loved it, the script was hilarious . . . BUT . . . I was the same stingy, toupee-topped, faulty fiddler; Mary was still snippy; Phil continued as a fugitive from Alcoholics Anonymous; Dennis was still stilly; Don continued to be fat; and Rochester was the same sassy butler he was.

Now, I've been reading this reviewer's column for many years, and it's a darn good column. But every week, every year, this columnist's style of writing is always the same. Always vers, pronouns and adjectives. Why

doesn't he get some new things? (Ed. note: If he's referring to me, I added prepositions in 1946, first man in the business to change with the times).

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Radio critics scream, "Why don't the comics stop already with programs about Thanksgiving and Christmas. The air is filled with them." What would they have me do on Christmas? Set off skyrockets and roman candles and have Phil wish me a Happy Fourth of July?

On opening programs, why do the comics all dot he same thing—talk about what they did on their vacations? Well, let me ask you something. If you worked with someone closely and then separated for the entire summer, what would be the first thing you'd ask him when you saw him again? How he liked Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*?

Oh well, television is with us now, and I'm waiting for some reviewer to say, "It was an enjoyable video show, but darn it, always the same old faces."

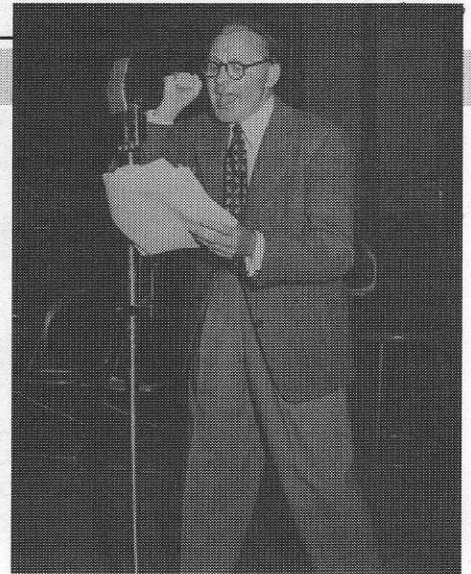
## CBS NABS SKELTON IN NEW RAID ON NBC

New York, Jan. 24.—(AP)—The Columbia Broadcasting System made another talent raid on the National Broadcasting Company today, this time coming up with Comedian Red Skelton.

CBS said Skelton, now heard at 9:30 p.m. eastern standard time, Friday nights on NBC, would switch to CBS next fall and would be heard at 8:30 p.m. eastern standard time, Sunday nights.

Last fall CBS got Amos 'n' Andy away from NBC and, at the first of the year, added

*Continued next page*



BOB FRANKLIN'S

# Radio News

January 7, 1949

I've often wondered what I'd do if someone shoved a microphone in my hand and said, "start talking, you're on the air." I'd probably run.

Jack McElroy is a man who didn't run—or maybe he couldn't since he tips the scales at around 250—when this happened on his "audition" for the emcee spot on "Breakfast in Hollywood."

The audition turned out to be an actual broadcast, which Jack McElroy came through

### TONITE'S KGO HIGHLIGHTS

- 6:30 ..... The Sheriff
- 7 ..... Fights
- 8 ..... The Fat Man
- 8:30 ..... This Is Your FBI
- 9 ..... Break the Bank
- 10 ..... Richfield Reporter
- 10:15 ..... Damon Runyon Theater

with flying words and colors.

One of Jack's pleasant duties each day at 1 p.m. on "Breakfast in Hollywood" is top read the Good Neighbor Letter and award a Good Neighbor orchid to some person who has found that happiness comes from doing things to others.

I'm proud to mention today's orchid. It goes to a Bay Area lady—Mrs. Ellen Strain

*Continued next page*

Old News is Good News — 60 Years Ago This Month. The Crosby and Franklin columns were taken verbatim from the radio section of the January 7, 1949 (Friday) edition of the Oakland [CA] *Tribune*. The CBS story was taken verbatim from the January 25, 1949 (Tuesday) edition of the Joplin [MO] *Globe*. Every effort has been made to replicate the layout including type style—so you are there!

**Brecher**

a single page of one-liners.

Brecher also wrote screenplays for the Marx Brothers' *At the Circus* and *Go West*. In addition he shared an Oscar nomination for co-writing the screenplay for *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Brecher's other screenplay credits include *Shadow of the Thin Man*, *DuBarry was a Lady*, *Yolanda and the Thief* and *Bye Bye Birdie*.

He also wrote, produced and directed *The Life of Riley* (1949), a Universal-International film based on the radio program and featuring William Bendix. Rosemary DeCamp as Peg and John Brown as Digger O'Dell, "the friendly undertaker," reprised their roles in the film. Reportedly, a pilot TV film was produced in 1948 with Herb Vigran, but the impetus for the television series was Brecher's motion picture.

Because Bendix had film commitments Jackie Gleason was given the role of Chester A. Riley, but, as one TV historian noted, Gleason's wise-cracking persona was ill-suited for the bumbling and oafish behavior of Bendix. As such, the series lasted a single season.

In 1953, however, Brecher and Bendix brought the definitive series to television and galvanizing William Bendix in the role, and bringing into the American idiom Riley's expressed exasperation at life: "It's a losing fight!" and "What a revoltin' development this is!"

In 1955, Brecher created and co-produced with George Burns *The People's Choice*, a sitcom that featured Jackie Cooper and a talking basset hound named Cleo that only the audience could hear.

His last creative work as told to Hank Rosenfeld is a book about the many Hollywood notables who crossed his path titled *The Wicked Wit of the West* published this month.

**CBS raids NBC**

Jack Benny. And CBS recently announced an agreement to bring Bing Crosby to the network nest season from the American Broadcasting Company, where he now broadcasts.

**May Get Bergen**

Trade circles say Edgar Bergen and his dummy, Charlie McCarthy, may be the next additions to the CBS talent roster. Bergen retired temporarily from radio at the end of the year when his sponsor gave up his NBC Sunday night show.

However, the talent battle hasn't been entirely a one-sided affair.

NBC said "Harvest of Stars," now heard on CBS, would switch to NBC in April. And a network spokesman said "that will be the tenth program we have taken from them in the past 15 or 16 months."

And on the same week-end that CBS got Benny from NBC, it lost the Art Linkletter "Houseparty" show to ABC.

**Franklin's Radio News**

of San Rafael—who certainly deserves it for raising four orphan children after their real Mother and Father were killed.

**Local Broadcast:** From Studio A, Radio City, this Saturday at 6:30 comes the initial KGO broadcast of "Young People's Symphony of the East Bay." Tickets are available at the Radio City Box Office.

**Fights Tonight at 7:** Undefeated Robert Villemain slaps leather with Steve Belloise. Bill Corum and Don Dunphy will be at ringside.

**Theater Guild Sunday:** If you're an Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne fan—and who isn't—make a date for Sunday at 6:30 p.m. over KGO. "Mr. and Mrs. Theater" star in "O Mistress Mine." This uproarious comedy was one of Broadway's smash bits.

Tony Martin, now heard nightly at the Fairmont Hotel, will be the guest on "Breakfast in the Alley" Sunday at 11:30 a.m.

**Saturday Note:** "Little Herman" makes his second appearance on KGO at 6 p.m. in the story of the "Jade Buddah."

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Bob Steinmetz, P.O. Box 669, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266-0669, [SPERDVAC@aol.com](mailto:SPERDVAC@aol.com).

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