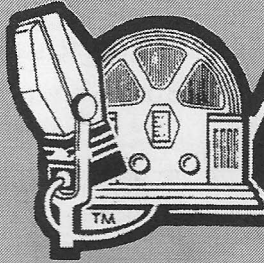


ROSA RIO • NEW BOOKS • ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT • THE RADIOWAVABLE GUIDES OF THE HOT STOVE LEAGUE • NEWS

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RADIOGRAM

Vol. 35 • No. 2

February 2010

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY GO TO WAR





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If Music Be The Food of Love, Play On . . .

THE AMAZING ROSA RIO

AT THE AGE OF EIGHT, Rosa Rio informed her family that, "When I grow up, I want to play a big piano, wear pretty clothes and lots of jewelry, and make people happy." One hundred years later and Rosa Rio is still playing on.

This writer recalls leafing through the pages of *The Big Broadcast* by Frank Buxton and Bill Owen back in the early 1970s in much the manner of Fibber McGee devouring the contents of his beloved almanac. I was happily acquainting myself with the names of the

talented performers who had helped create radio. One name that kept popping up time and again was Rosa Rio, as organist for myriad popular programs from the 1930s onward. Rosa Rio was born on June 2, 1902 into a traditional Southern

family with strong views on what a girl could and could not do with her life. When the time came, Rosa was sent off to Oberlin College to study classical music. Her parents decided that their daughter would eventually become a teacher. Rosa made other plans. During a trip to Cleveland, Rosa visited one of the great ornate movie palaces of the day. As Rosa told one interviewer, "I heard a sound I had never heard before. I saw the pinpoint of a light grow larger and a console came from out of the pit, on the right hand side of the theater. And I heard a theater organ for the first time in my life." That transformational moment changed the direction of Rosa Rio's life. She soon transferred to the Eastman School of Music where she learned the art of motion picture accompaniment. After graduation, Rosa performed in theatres in New York City, New Orleans, Scranton, Pennsylvania and New London, Connecticut.

With the arrival of talking films, the need for theatre organists diminished. Rosa started a new career as an organist for radio. Rio began her radio career as a "temporary" organist for the National Broadcasting Company. The "temporary" performer eventually became permanent and, in time, Rosa Rio became known as the "Queen of the Soaps" due to the large number of dramas for which she

supplied accompaniment. One of the early shows Rio worked on was *The Shadow* with a very young Orson Welles. In fact, Rosa was Welles' first organist on the show. In an interview for National Public Radio in 2006, Rio reflected upon her early association with Welles. Rio remembers him as a fun-loving trickster in his *Shadow* days. In particular, she expressed admiration for Welles' adaptability on two different mikes: a regular mike and a filtered mike. On the regular mike, Welles was Lamont Cranston. Four steps away was a filtered mike where Welles trans-

formed himself into The Shadow. "The change of voice, the change of character, it was fantastic" she recalled.

The Shadow was far from the only show on which Rosa Rio appeared. From the 1930s through the 1950s, for 23 years,



Rio played music for innumerable programs including: *Cavalcade of America*, *The Court of Missing Heirs*, *Front Page Farrell*, *Lorenzo Jones*, *My True Story*, *When a Girl Marries* and *Ethel and Albert*. In addition to her ever-growing list of regular assignments, Rio substituted as needed on many other programs. In addition, she served as an "on-call" organist ready to step in and fill time whenever a broadcast failed to come off or ended abruptly. As a staff organist for NBC, Rosa found herself often performing for between seven and nine shows a day. Her hectic schedule frequently made it necessary to scurry from studio to studio. Rosa's talent and popularity was such that she starred in a daily musical series of her own, *Rosa Rio Rhythms*.

When dramatic radio began to go the way of silent films, Rosa Rio moved over to television and played for shows including *As the World Turns*, *The Today Show* and *The Guiding Light*. Rosa Rio has never stopped performing. In one venue or another, Rio has remained at her beloved organ. Today, as she nears 108 years of age, Rosa Rio has made the Tampa (FL) Theatre the beneficiary of her enduring talent, bringing the past alive.

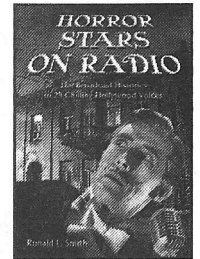
The lights are lowered, a mighty Wurlitzer rises from the pit and the past calls out to an appreciative audience. 🎹



Hollywood's Voices of Horror Chill the Airwaves in New Book



Lon Chaney, John Carradine and Bela Lugosi—three of Hollywood's voices of horror—prepare Tor Johnson for lunch in publicity photograph for the 1956 film *The Black Sleep* that also starred a fourth voice of horror, Basil Rathbone.



Many stars of classic horror movies crossed over to radio during and after their careers, and these aural performances by the celebrated masters of menace are chronicled in Ronald L. Smith's *Horror Stars on Radio: The Broadcast Histories of 29 Chilling Hollywood Voices*, recently published by McFarland and Company.

The 260-page book examines the contributions of such scary cinema stalwarts as Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Peter Lorre and Vincent Price to radio drama as well as to what used to be called "spoken word albums." The book contains script excerpts as well as excerpts from the narrated albums and music singles.

Each star's appearances are listed by show and air date with descriptions of the subject matter.

In addition to the above named performers the book chronicles the radio performances of Henry Hull, Lon Chaney, Laird Cregar, John Carradine, Basil Rathbone, Lionel Atwill, George Zucco, Henry Daniell, Claude Rains, Charles Laughton as well as the following so-called scream queens: Elsa Lanchester, Una O'Connor, Maria Ouspenskaya, Gale Sondergaard, Agnes Moorehead, Helen Chandler, Julie Bishop, Ann Doran, Louise Allbritton, Hillary Brooke, Evelyn Ankers, Jane Adams, Gloria Stuart, Elena Verdugo and Fay Wray.

Watch for a review of the book in a future edition of *Radiogram*.

The \$45 trade paperback is available from Amazon.com, mcfarlandpub.com as well as the publisher's phone line at 800-253-2187.

'Fibber McGee & Molly' Win the War

Dr. Mickey Smith's *How Fibber McGee and Molly Won World War II*, recently published by BearManor Media, is an essay combining serious subjects and comedy in chronicling a very special period in the broadcast life of one of radio's most popular and best-loved series.

Smith describes how the special combination of the stars themselves, a writing genius, and the "perfect" sponsor, produced a one-of-a-kind program melding laughs and patriotism during one of America's darkest hours. Jim and Marian Jordan somehow hooked up with writing genius Don Quinn, and the unparalleled support of the S. C. Johnson Wax Company to produce an entertaining funny series of programs with an unwavering message—America was right, the men (and women) in the military deserved unflinching support, and the folks at home had a vital role

to play, assuring ultimate victory.

The story of *Fibber McGee and Molly's* efforts at victory is told through excerpts from scores of broadcasts enhanced by the author's observations. It is an account of the difficult but ultimately successful efforts of the government and the broadcast industry to adapt to wartime conditions, and it provides an illuminating backdrop to the series story. Of particular note are the McGees' messages which, while always supportive of the War effort, were often poignant within the context of a comedy show.

Chapters include "The Men Behind the Words," "The Perfect Sponsor," and "The Words that Won the War."

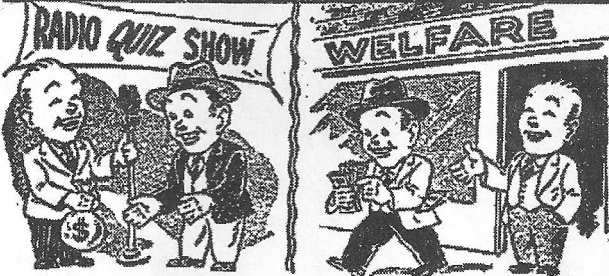
The book is available at Amazon.com and at bearmanormedia.com. Signed copies can be ordered at Mickey Smith, 1411 Lawson St., Oxford, MS 38655.

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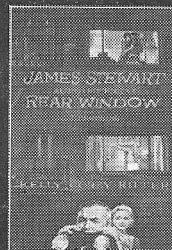
Clever entrepreneur uses the then recent phenomenon of quiz shows to promote his finance company in this advertisement taken from the February 6, 1950 edition of the *Portsmouth OH Times*.

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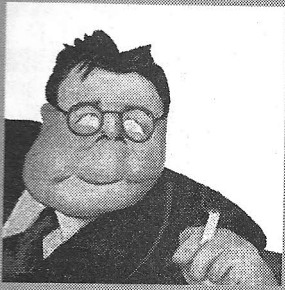
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That Smart Alec!

by John Crosby

For no reason whatever, except that I had nothing else to do, I fell to musing today about that waspish, sentimental, corpulent enthusiast, Alexander Woollcott, whose spinsterish and extraordinarily self-confident voice has been missing from the air since his death just seven years ago.

I keep wondering what he's up to in the wherever. Lunching with the more august Seraphim, I expect. Ignoring the humble folk, the Cherubim. Spinning his improbable tales about some celestial dog who found his way clear across heaven to the master who once housed him on earth.

"And before I forget, let me pass on something I've just heard—the sequel to a story I told in one of these fireside chats back in April. Maybe I could best recall that story if I first reported something told me by my friend and neighbor, Katherine Cornell—something she witnessed this time a year ago with her own eyes—eyes filled with unshed tears."

THAT FRAGMENT, from Woollcott's broadcast on June 24, 1937, is typical of the Woollcott style—untidy, archaic, rambling but strangely musical.

It's also typical of the Woollcott content. You get the hint of wonders to come, the casual mention of a "friend and neighbor" who happens to bear a very famous name, and—above all—those unshed tears.

There isn't anyone approaching Woollcott on the air today. If there were I doubt that he'd survive. Woollcott became entrenched in the earlier days when radio was more receptive to individualists. He went his own way without fear of sponsors or Hooper. And, of course, you can't do that any more.

"ALBERT WAS A costly and preposterous Airedale who had been laboriosial taught to assault all suspicious-looking strangers. In fact, at the kennels where he was born and bred, one of the underprivileged was engaged for a small weekly wage just for Albert to practice on."

I'm a little mistrustful of that statement, but it is the sort of thing that would fascinate Woollcott. He was helplessly addicted to the practice of endowing dogs with the frailties and temperament of mankind.

Of his own dog, Duchess, for example: "Considered as a one man dog, she's a flop. In her fidelity to me, she's a little too like that girl in France who was true to the 26th Infantry."

The personality—fierce, witty, petty, pretentious, unquenchable inquisitive—still hovers over all these old scripts, these old Woollcott anecdotes.

There's no commentator on the air today who has such a rich, personal flavor. It's a pity, too.

On the Airlanes

LIONEL BARRYMORE, one of the most fabulous figures of stage, screen and radio, will be starred in "At Home with Lionel Barrymore," which makes its debut on Mutual at 4:15 today. The program will be heard Monday through Friday.

The Dean of the American stage and screen digs into his lore of anecdotes and stories and delivers them in his usual style. In these daily 15-minute programs, the man with the steel eyes and the picturesque mane of white hair, reminisces about his absorbing career, telling stories about entertainment immortals he has known for many years.

BROADCAST SPEECH

WPAY will broadcast a talk by Anthony Eden for Britain's Conservative party from London at 7 p.m.

ADVENTURE

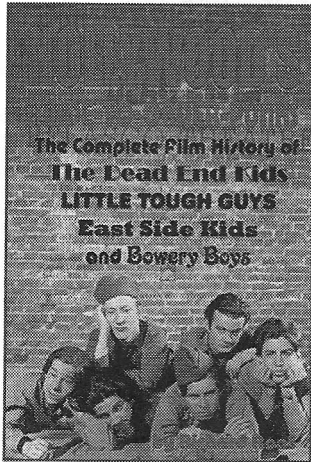
8 p.m.—WPAY: The story on "Box 13," starring Alan Ladd, is "Speed to Burn," drama of the stolen car racket. Ladd plays the role of Dan Holiday, who gets right into the center of a dangerous stolen car syndicate, all for the sake of obtaining material for his stories.

Reprinted from the February 6, 1950 "Radio in Review" column by John Crosby as published in the *Portsmouth OH Times*.

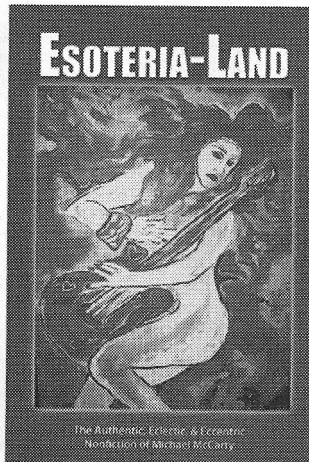
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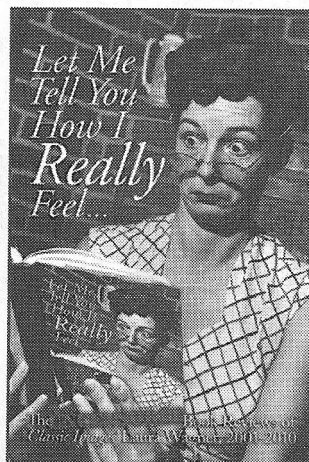
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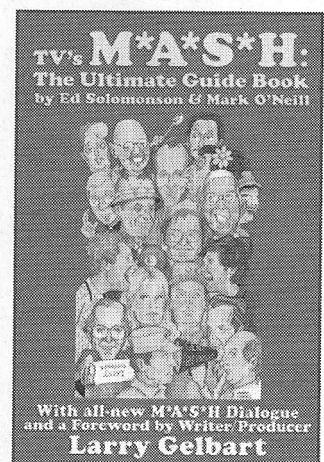
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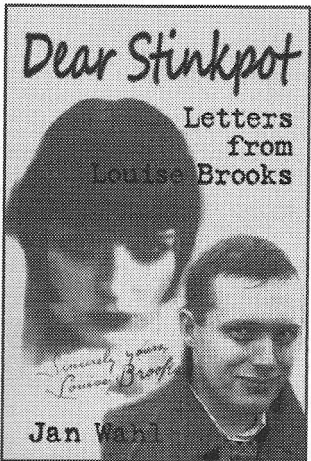
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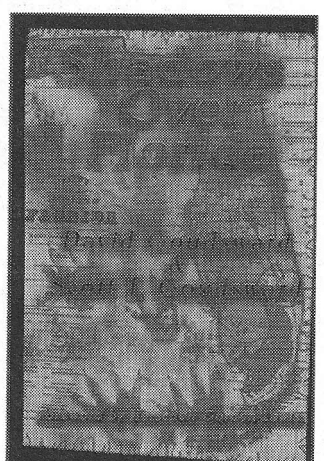
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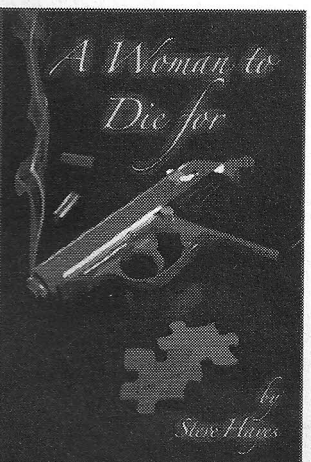
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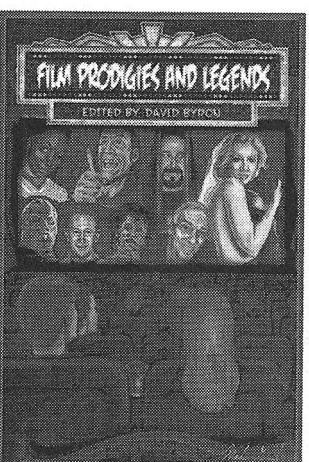
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FIBBER



MCGEE *and* MOLLY

I GO TO WAR

by Mickey Smith

BETWEEN December 7, 1941 and V-J Day (officially declared as September 2, 1945), there were 144 *Fibber McGee and Molly* shows broadcast on radio. In virtually every one of these broadcasts some reference to the war then raging throughout the world was mentioned either explicitly or by implication. Sometimes an entire show was dedicated to a war-related issue—shortages, military service, home front support for the war effort. Somehow these vital and serious messages were delivered with great humor, warmth, and wholesome patriotism.

Doing a live comedy show during a time of national crisis must have been difficult at best. How could one ignore the tragedies of Bataan and Corregidor or the triumphs of the Doolittle Raid on the Victory at Midway? The temptation at least to add a mention in the course of the broadcast must have been very strong, but almost never happened. Some of big events did receive special treatment, however, and that is what this article is about.

Two Days After Pearl Harbor

One can only try to imagine the atmosphere in the studio only two days after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The show had already been written! Indeed, the finishing touches would have been put on the script on the very day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Uncertainty and apprehension must have been rampant, but the show went on.

The broadcast began with an announcement: "NBC will be on the air with the latest war news at the beginning of every program day and night. We thank the sponsor of this program for relinquishing its time in order to bring you the latest news from the NBC Newsroom." This was the first few minutes

of what would become hours of commercial time donated by the Johnson Company to the war effort.

It was up to Harlow Wilcox to open on a seemingly ordinary note. But not for long: "We have just received this message for our listeners in a telegram from the President of S.C. Johnson and Son, Incorporated, our sponsor. In these serious days, there can be no division of opinion. The United States is at war. We are all ready and eager to do our part. The makers of Johnson's Wax and GloCoat believe it is in the public interest to continue programs as entertaining as *Fibber McGee and Molly*. They have a place in national morale. So you can continue to hear *Fibber McGee and Molly* and still be in touch with latest developments. We have asked the National Broadcasting Company to feel free at any time to cut into our programs with important news flashes and announcements," Signed, H.F. Johnson, Jr."

The program continued more or less as usual. There was no reference to the war in the program proper. There just hadn't been time to work in war messages, especially in a way, later perfected, that did not interfere inordinately with the flow of humor. The program centered on Fibber's supposed ability to buy things wholesale.

This was, admittedly, not a great show, but everyone had other things on their minds. Harlow Wilcox seemed to confirm this by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, we know everyone is anxiously awaiting the words of President Roosevelt. In the meantime the makers of Johnson's Wax have this message for you. America has answered the treacherous attack of the Japanese by declaring war until the victorious end. To assure our victory, we must turn our dollars into guns and our

dimes into bullets. Buy United States Defense Bonds and Stamps at your post office, bank, and savings and loan office. Get them from your newspaper carrier boy or your retail dealer . . . Don't delay. Do it now."

The show closed with a moving rendition of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" (also known as "America"), sung by the live studio audience.

D-Day

"Dedicated to those men who look through their bombsights for a glimpse of the victory to come." That is how Molly McGee (Marian Jordan) introduced "The Bombardier's Song."

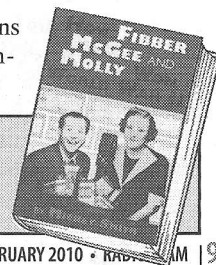
What would you do if you had worked all week planning and writing a 30-minute live comedy radio show only to learn that less than 24 hours before air time the long-awaited Allied invasion of Europe had begun? If you were the people at *Fibber McGee and Molly*, you would have prepared for this day weeks, maybe months, in advance. And they did!

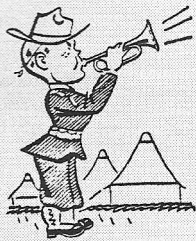
The broadcast began with a network announcement that the news will take precedence over all other programs. The program proper begins with a statement of Fibber (Jim Jordan): "Ladies and Gentlemen, Molly and I are mighty proud to be associated with the radio industry, which at this moment is fulfilling its promise of instant communication in time of world crisis." Molly adds: "The next half hour will be devoted to bringing you information immediately as received by NBC's News Bureau!"

The program then consisted of patriotic musical selections by Billy Mills' orchestra and the King's Men interspersed with comments by the McGees.

The musical selections ranged from such stan-

This article was adapted from material in the book, *How Fibber McGee and Molly Won World War II*, published by Bear Manor Media. Copyright © 2009 by Mickey C. Smith and used by permission of the author.





"So let us all show our new president, Mr. Harry Truman of Missouri, that he has our complete loyalty and support in the difficult task of winning this war and leading this nation to peace and security."

dards as George M. Cohan's "It's a Grand Old Flag," to such lesser-known numbers as "The Bombardier's Song." The other selections were: "Song of the Merchant Marine," "U.S. Field Artillery March," "Semper Paratus," "This is the Army, Mr. Jones," "National Emblem March," "American Patrol," "Armed Forces Medley," and "Army Hymn."

Harlow Wilcox spoke, but not with a commercial, the Johnson people having donated their time, a gesture made many times during the War. Harlow introduced most of the musical selections.

Fibber came on to introduce a song, "The Time is Now." He noted that this is particularly appropriate because if there ever was a time that is "Now, it is now." He also introduced a song that "puts into words what is in all our hearts . . . This is Worth Fighting For."

The program was interrupted once by a report from the NBC Newsroom: "Here's the latest version of the invasion coming from the enemy. Swedish correspondents in Berlin said the German High Command expects new and larger landings before Wednesday dawn and declare that several divisions now are fighting on the big beach, in some places hand-to-hand. These correspondents quoted Hitler's command as saying the invasion front stretches two hundred and forty miles . . . In a broadcast statement the German High Command described the fighting . . . in the Le Havre area as being in full swing and declares that everywhere along the invasion front British and American troops are putting up a most tenacious resistance."

When Fibber next spoke, it was to note that: "It's comforting to note that [the military] has the finest equipment and the best leadership of any army in the world. And that no military operation in history has had the careful planning and preparation that preceded this operation."

"In addition, our men have a weapon which our enemies cannot have: The knowledge that God is on our side," Molly says. "To us, D-Day means Divine help and each hour the hopes of all of us for a speedy victory."

The program ended with a reminder that it would be followed by an address from President Roosevelt.

The Deaths of Roosevelt and Hitler

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd president

of the United States, and the only president to serve more than two terms, died on March 29, 1945. He had been in very poor health, but his death still came as a shock to most Americans.

Another tough wartime assignment for the stars and writers: Just days before the broadcast, they learned of the unexpected death of President Roosevelt. The show was not significantly altered, but the death of the leader of the country was soberly acknowledged at the end of the broadcast, when at the conclusion of the broadcast, Jim Jordan says, "Ladies and gentlemen, the traditional sentiment of people from Missouri has always been 'Show me.'"

"So let us all show our new president, Mr. Harry Truman of Missouri, that he has our complete loyalty and support in the difficult task of winning this war and leading this nation to peace and security," Marian implores.

Although Adolf Hitler's death has been the subject of much speculation—his body

was never found—he most popular belief was that Hitler and his bride, Eva Braun, committed suicide on April 30, 1945. The Russians, apparently, saw their remains. The Third Reich's minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, Goebbels, and his wife killed themselves and their six children at the same time.

Before the show of May 1, 1945, this announcement was made: "The National Broadcasting Company reminds its listeners that regular programs will be interrupted for the broadcast of any new developments. Today, the Hamburg radio announced the death of Adolf Hitler. This report from the enemy has had no official confirmation from Allied sources. Should any developments occur on this or any other major story, you will be kept informed by NBC." This report came just two weeks after the McGee's' broadcast wishing President Harry Truman well following the death of President Franklin Roosevelt.

V-E Day

The first voice the listener heard was that of Harlow Wilcox, serious but optimistic, tempered with caution: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Harlow Wilcox. The curtain has fallen on the first act of the greatest drama the world has ever seen. The second and, we hope, the last World War. Act two is going on in the Pacific Theater. In expressing our tremendous admiration and gratitude to our fighting forces, we feel that it is best to support their efforts until we complete the final victory



BEHIND-THE-SCENES. Neil Hamilton goes over the script with Jim and Marian Jordan as Lucille Ball listens to faux-director Charlie McCarthy during break in shooting *Look Who's Laughing*, a Fibber McGee and Molly motion picture produced during the war by RKO.

by carrying on with our own jobs the best we can. In this case our job is to bring a few smiles to the home front and to do our best to relieve the tension and anxiety in the homes of the men whom are not here to laugh with us. So tonight, we present the regular Johnson's Wax Program as our stars go on the air in a tribute to the stars in the windows." Windows usually displayed small flags representing family members in the military. Gold stars meant a mortal casualty.

The theme of tonight's show on V-E Day itself was the Wartime Housing Shortage. Fibber offered to perform a housing survey of Wistful Vista for the City Council for a mere \$50. He arrived home at 1:45 to inform Molly of his good fortune. The survey must be completed by 5:30 the same day. Fibber was not concerned; he had a plan, as he always did.

The rest of the show dealt with the skepticism of all the other characters about his ability to do the job. The first skeptic was Alice Darling, a roomer with the McGees, and very popular with the boys. She also worked in an aircraft factory. Molly asks Alice if V-E Day will make any difference in her work at the airplane factory. Alice responds: "Well, not until the other half of the war is over, Mrs. McGee. I figure if Europe is morning and Japan the afternoon, V-E Day is just the whistle blowing for lunch."

"You're absolutely right Alice," McGee responds. "It ain't fair for the players to go home after the first game of a double header."

Harlow Wilcox turns up in his role as a cast member. He, too, is skeptical about McGee's ability to do the job in the limited time remaining. He invites McGee to go bowling, but McGee believes the bowling alley won't be open on V-E Day. Wilcox puts him straight on that. The alley is run by Wilcox's cousin, Big Frankie Wilson, who says he'd close every other day of the year, but not on V-E Day because "there are a lot of soldiers and sailors in town who need inexpensive recreation. He says he'd feel like a rat slamming the door in the faces of those who made this day possible—some of them on the way to the Pacific to do some more fighting. Today they can all bowl free."

Next to knock on the door was "Doc" Gamble, Fibber's favorite friendly antagonist. After an exchange of their patented insults, the doctor leaves and leaves behind more skepticism about McGee's project.

Then Molly—"Oh, Beulah!" The standard response: "Somebody bawlin' for Beulah?" A black maid/cook Beulah is played by a white man and his appearance and voice get an immediate laugh from the live studio audience. When McGee asks how she celebrated V-E Day, she had gone to church. "I say a little prayer for the boys who did such a good



Announcer Harlow Wilcox and co-writer Phil Leslie go over script with Jim and Marian Jordan during rehearsal for one of many war broadcasts of *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

job over there in Europe. I wasn't in no mood for no whoop-de-do. If you got a brother in the navy like I does in the Pacific, you is prone to save your confetti for another day." When McGee notes that is still good news, Beulah agrees: "I ain't denyin' that but I can't help thinkin' there ain't no dancing in the streets of Manila."

Well, what about the survey? Exactly at 5:30 there is a knock on the door. Looking out the window, Molly sees the street crowded with people. "Start counting them," says McGee. "What have you done?" asks Molly. "I took out an ad in the paper saying Room for Rent; apply 79 Wistful Vista at 5:30, Keep counting!" When they get the total, McGee calls the mayor's office with the news that there are 450 people looking for housing. He and Molly leave by the back door to pick up the \$50.

The show closes with a patriotic song, followed by Jim and a Marian Jordan in a most serious vein:

JIM: Ladies and Gentlemen, this is one of the days we've been looking forward to for so long. This is one of the days for which men left their wives and children and their profession and put on uniforms to give their lives to end tyranny and aggression forever.

MARIAN: But this is just one of the days. There is another day coming and may it be coming soon, when we can celebrate complete victory. To leave our jobs now and quit before the job is finished would

be false to the wives and children they left behind.

JIM: Perhaps you know that radio programs like this one are recorded and sent to our forces everywhere overseas for their entertainment and to bring them a smile or two from home. That's our job.

MARIAN: So, let's all keep going and keep working and keep faith with the ones who are still doing battle for the things we believe in.

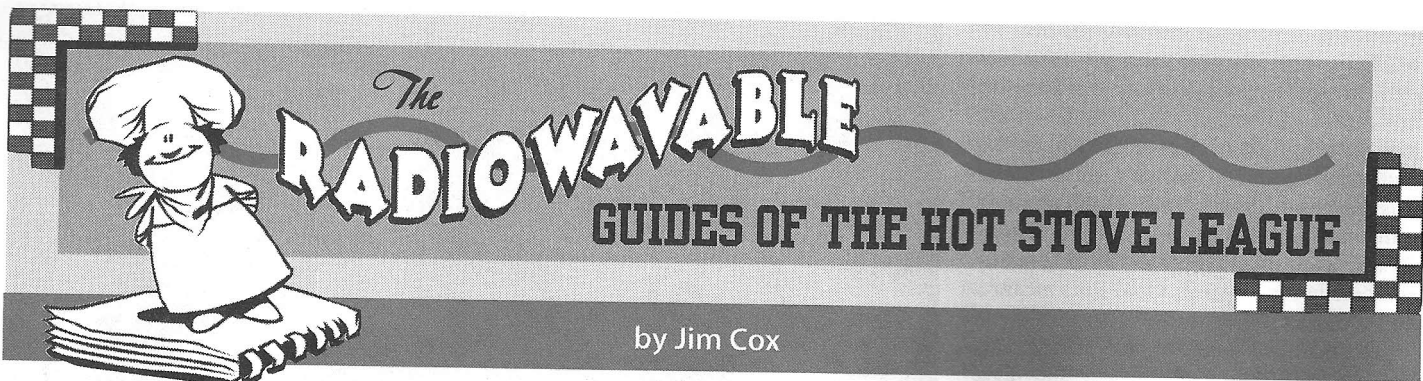
JIM: Good night.

MARIAN: Good night, all.

This broadcast, on a very special day, was in many ways typical of the programs throughout the war. Although the government had issued guidelines concerning messages to be broadcast to the public about war issues, *Fibber McGee and Molly* far exceeded them. Nearly every program contained some war-related message. Sometimes it only amounted to a wisecrack about Hitler; at other times, it was the entire theme of a program.

The ability to blend humor with such serious subjects as black market meat, gasoline, rubber and doctor shortages and, in the case of the program highlighted here, the housing shortage, can be attributed to the genius of Don Quinn, head writer throughout the war, and his partner, Phil Leslie, who joined the program in 1943 and worked seamlessly with Quinn.

Continued Page 14



Some members of this reading audience will recall that—during its earliest days—one of the dominant formats proffered by television’s premiering stations was a near obsession with cooking shows. Remember? So much of the fare in embryonic video, it seemed, could be classified as history repeating itself—or radio revisited. Less than two decades earlier, the aural medium was overpopulated by culinary arts consultants who were blazing a trail that was simple for local pioneering TV schedulers to follow.

INDEED, in the late 1920s and 1930s such programming was a recurring element of an ethereal landscape filled with advice-giving experts dispensing tips on an expanding assortment of self-help topics. In addition to meal preparation specialists they included guides in beauty and grooming, consumer purchasing, family issues, financial planning, gardening, health, home improvement, psychology, relationships and several others. While each could be turned into a fascinating study the kitchen capers of the hot stove league (not pertaining to baseball banter in the off-season, by the way) are the theme of this introspective.

The daytime panorama of the early radio epoch was almost altogether programmed by local stations at its start. The fledgling networks—including NBC’s two webs, the Red and Blue, and its principal competitor, CBS, dubbed “Columbia” in those days as in Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System—had their hands full developing shows for nighttime and weekend audiences. As time passed, of course, more and more daytime programs were added. But with the exception of an occasional musical or variety entry the dominant daytime radio series of the early years were those of the cooking and household hint variety, produced by local stations and ultimately by the major chains.

The origins of cooking on the ether may not have been permanently established although it’s clear that such features were already drawing the attention of a budding audio by the late 1920s. In some cases such programming was rapidly becoming staples of the new form. Somewhat surprisingly, the hosts of those series were frequently men.

For instance, Ed East and Ralph Dumke—a couple of wacky types who predated the stunt-filled studio audience antics of Ralph Edwards and Art Linkletter—parodied aural household hints series on their East and Dumke show in Chicago in 1928. Their reach was significantly magnified within two years when NBC beamed its *Sisters of the Skillet* program to a national audience. Much of East and Dumke’s fare was aimed at the kitchen, which, incidentally, was squarely focused on an area that was ripe for increasing visibility. It wasn’t long in coming.

In 1933 George Rector presided over an NBC Blue quarter-hour one evening each week labeled *Cooking School for Children* on behalf of its sponsoring grocer, The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. The same host returned to the microphone in the 1937-38 season over CBS with *Dining with George Rector*, a quarter-hour underwritten by Phillips Packing Company three times a week. Meanwhile, Crosby Gaige appeared during that epoch (1937-38) over NBC Blue five mornings weekly with *Kitchen Cavalcade*.

During that landmark era American homemakers were introduced to multiple culinary innovators of the distaff side via the airwaves, too. Some were real women while others were little more than figments of a publicist’s inspired imagination. Yet their monikers became synonymous with good cooking and voracious appetites. The reputations of a limited few grew to be legends in themselves, even prevailing to the modern age, and signifying similar gastronomic satisfaction with contemporary palates.

A feminine quartet seems worthy of recognition. Winifred S. Carter, Mary Ellis

Ames, Frances Lee Barton and Betty Crocker shared more than a great love for recipes that could be broadcast to the increasing numbers of homemakers tuning in: they also could be distinguished by more than merely turning out a great soufflé; all four were designated home economics advisors representing major commercial manufacturers.

Procter & Gamble Company was embodied by Winifred S. Carter. In the 1930-31 radio season she was the hostess of *Cooking Travelogue*, a pithy feature on behalf of P&G’s Crisco shortening. Her morning 15-minute of fame occurred on Mondays over NBC Blue, Fridays on Columbia and Saturdays on NBC Red, giving her a shot at a greater audience than if she was held to a single chain.

Carter appeared in slick women’s magazine advertisements throughout the 1920s and 1930s not only on behalf of Crisco but for a couple of P&G’s leading cleansers, too, Chipso detergent and P&G White Naphtha bar soap. In some of those ads she was depicted offering advice to the homemakers. Thus, perceptibly, she had already acquired some name recognition with the periodical readers before arriving on the air to plug Crisco while dishing out her recipes.

Not much later Pillsbury Mills Inc. presented Mary Ellis Ames as its flesh-and-blood incarnation. For three years, 1933-36, she was hostess of Columbia’s *Cooking Closeups* variable weekday mornings. Furthermore, in that time frame she also pitched Pillsbury’s Best flour on NBC Blue’s daily soap opera, *Today’s Children* (1933-37).

During the Pillsbury commercials, Ames often mentioned recipes the listeners could have on request by sending name and address

on a label from the sponsor's product. The mailhook feature was a common practice sponsors used to acquire mailing lists and to determine the effectiveness of their commercials. The number of responses was also instrumental in calculating how many people were actually listening to the programs being purchased. Ames appeared in print advertising on behalf of the sponsor's extensive line of baking goods, too.

Frances Lee Barton's services were aired on behalf of General Foods Inc. In the 1930s glossy magazines she pushed Calumet baking powder and Swans Down cake mixes. Her NBC morning quarter-hour series on varying days aired under her own appellation (1932-35). She also plugged the sponsor's baking goods on *Kitchen Party*, a half-hour show on Fridays in 1935. Unlike the others mentioned thus far, when her radio broadcast era expired Barton remained employed. She persisted in representing General Foods in its print advertisements and personal appearances as late as the 1950s, in fact.

Of course, of the quartet of personalities named earlier, Betty Crocker was the most familiar to most Americans. Her durable cooking series, broadcast under her own moniker (sometimes *The Betty Crocker School of the Air*), predated all of her leading competitors. It was launched on a local Minneapolis station in 1924 and by late 1926—the year NBC was formed—it had found a place on that network in twice-weekly installments. Crocker's instructional show was to last virtually unimpeded on radio through 1953, alternating at different times between NBC Red and CBS, with days and hours in frequent transition. She, too, offered recipes to her listeners while unabashedly urging that those delicacies be made only "for best results" with Gold Medal flour and other General Mills products.

As most Americans know, of course, Betty Crocker was a fictitious person. She was created in 1921 after a promotion for Gold Medal swamped Washburn Crosby Company, a predecessor of General Mills, with inquiries about baking. To reply to its patrons in a more intimate way, the firm fabricated a mythical cooking expert. "Betty" sounded friendly and "Crocker" was derived from a retired corporate director's surname. In the 1930s she dished up tasty budget meals

to help a cash-strapped nation cope with the realities of an economy gone south. In 1945, *Fortune* reported that she had been voted the second-best-recognized lady in the nation, immediately behind Eleanor Roosevelt.

Various actresses played Betty Crocker on radio. When the series went to television, performer Adelaide Cumming Hawley portrayed the famous icon from 1949-64. Earlier, from 1939-46, she had presided over her own weekday radio series, *The Adelaide Hawley Show*, first on CBS and later on NBC Red.

There were other mascots invented in that era by various commercial manufacturers to hawk their wares in print advertising whose names also appeared on product labels. While the following may not be recalled as

broadcast home economists, their sobriquets were readily identified on the pantry shelves of millions of American homemakers—and in some cases, still are today: Ann Pillsbury, a fabled but fictitious food processor who became yet another characterization of Pillsbury Mills; Duncan Hines, a P&G cake mix king, who was actually based on a real individual; and Ann Page and Jane Parker, brand names adopted by A&P. Two more advertising inspirations who did appear regularly on the air were Aunt Jenny, who touted Lever

Brothers' Spry shortening on the soap opera bearing her name; and Bess Pringle, another imaginary cook who proffered P&G's Crisco on another durable daytime serial, *Young Doctor Malone*.

Americans loved scrumptious dining in the 20th century just as they do in the 21st. Those who tendered good things to eat and shared simple methods of fixing them were instant hits with the homemakers during radio's earliest days. ♣



Betty Crocker was the most familiar to most Americans. Her durable cooking series, broadcast under her own moniker (sometimes *The Betty Crocker School of the Air*), predated all of her leading competitors.

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On the Receiving End

Benny Still A Headache To NBC; Luckman Ouster A Soap Opera Loss?

by Clarke Thomas

Rochester of the Jack Benny show may get a show of his own.

Rochester, Eddie Anderson in real life, would probably have a program spoofing mysteries. In this half-hour show he would play the "Five O'Clock Shadow" or some such whodunit caricature. CBS is reported ready to put such a show on the air if the proposed sponsor, Franco-American products, decides to swing it.

This would be another of the shows hatched at the Benny roost, such as Dennis Day and Phil Harris.

NBC is really determined to stop that Benny man.

Reports are that the network has nine—count 'em—writers assigned to tis 6 p.m. entry opposite Jack Benny—"Christopher London."

With that 1.8 Hooper rating, however, even star Glenn Ford is reported slightly nervous. That kind of pull isn't increasing his stature any, Ford feels.

Charles Luckman's sudden boot from his \$300,000 a year job as Lever Bros. president in the United States is affecting radio.

The "new brooms" in the company are really giving the company's radio and television programs the searching eye. The company's time-talent outlay is more than \$10 million a year, so the radio business is watching things.

Fibber McGee and Molly

V-J Day

On September 1 (Tokyo time), aboard the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, the Allies and Japan signed the surrender agreement. General Douglas MacArthur signed for the Allied Powers, Admiral Chester Nimitz for the United States, and Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu for Japan. President Truman proclaimed September 2 as V-J Day—Victory over Japan Day. Three years, eight months and twenty-two days after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, World War II ended.

Fibber McGee and Molly were enjoying their annual summer hiatus on V-J Day, but we can be sure they enjoyed the day immensely. ☺

Some of the programs Luckman championed may go by the board. However, observers doubt if Lever will drop such top-rated shows as "Lux Radio Theatre," "Talent Scouts," "My Friend Irma," and Bob Hope.

A publicity blurb about a Guy Lombardo show has boomeranged for NBC.

The network announced it is planning to audition the Guy Lombardo "Pick A Hit" show, which is supposed to "uncover" amateur songwriters with talent.

This has brought in more than 3,000 entries from would-be ballad-writers who want the magic key to Tin Pan Alley.

Trouble is announcement of the show was strictly routine and if the program goes on the air it won't be until late summer.

Reprinted from the February 19, 1950 edition of the Hutchinson KS News-Herald.



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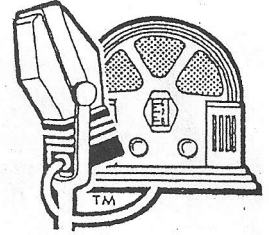
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