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RADIOGRAM

Vol. 35 • No. 3

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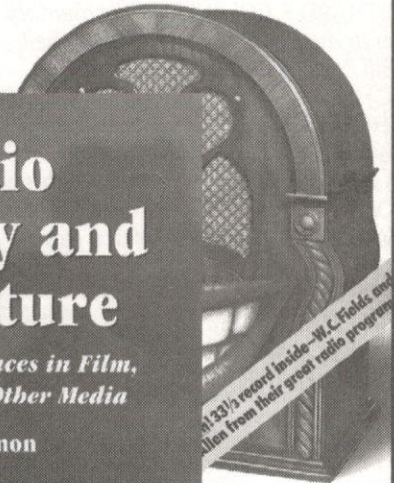
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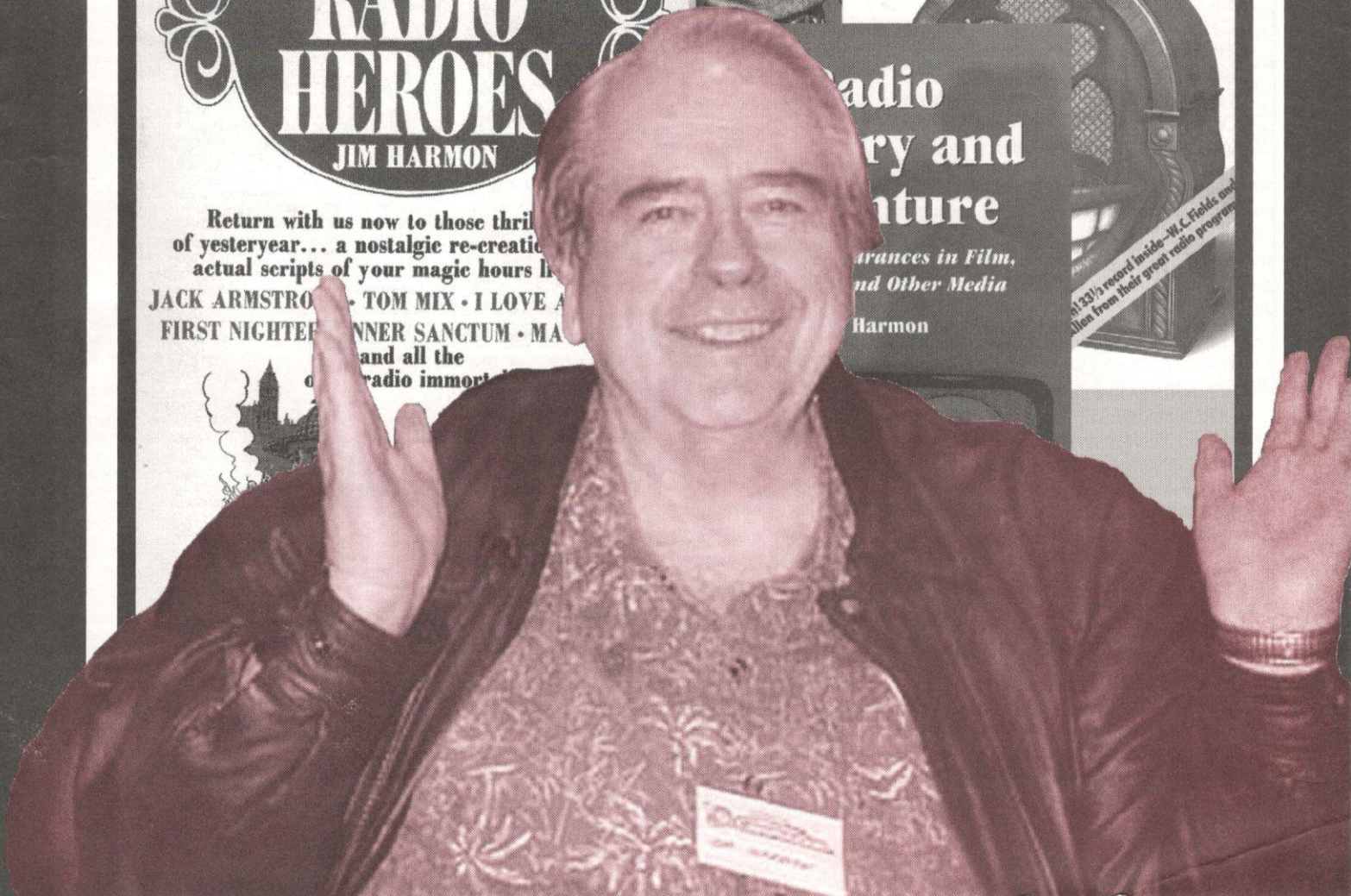
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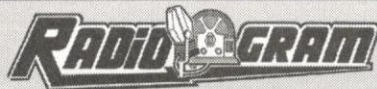
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Volume 35 • Number 3 • March 2010



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ADVERTISING RATES. Full page \$125; half-page \$70; quarter page \$40. Rates subject to change without notice.

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The Mysterious Traveler



They Cleared the Static and Helped the Audiences to Listen

RADIO, in its prime and innocence, spawned a small cadre of professional critics. The radio critic, or euphemistically "radio editor," usually came in last among the fraternity of critics when it came to status and approbation. At the top of the hierarchy came the drama and literary critics. The music critic had status. Even the movie critic had a measure of standing. The radio critic was generally invisible to the naked eye.

The radio critic was usually in the unenviable position of trying to write intelligently about the most common and under appreciated art form around. A few writers, through dint of perseverance and longevity, managed to pull it off. Four of the more widely syndicated and influential radio critics were all based in New York. Indeed, New York remained the hub of radio criticism throughout the medium's primacy. Ben Gross, *New York Daily News*; John Crosby, *New York Herald Tribune*; Harriet Van Horne, *New York World-Telegram*; and Jack Gould, *New York Times* covered and commented on radio from the early days to its last gasps as a dramatic medium. As radio waned, all four critics would add television to their focus.

The story of how Ben Gross came to serve as radio critic for the *New York Daily News* was probably typical of the early selection process. As recounted by Gross in his memoir *I Looked and I Listened*, the future radio critic was introduced to radio one day in the hot summer of 1925. Returning to the office from covering a crime of passion, Gross was ordered to substitute for the newspaper's ailing radio editor. Completely out of his depth and loathing radio, Gross went in search of the newspaper's radio room. Once he located the radio he found he hadn't a clue as to how to hook up and turn on the radio and no one else on staff would admit to knowing how to turn on the contraption. Eventually, Gross tracked down one of the building electricians who demonstrated the process of turning on a radio. The fill-in critic listened to *The Happiness Boys* and some other programs that eve-

ning and wrote his column. That might have been the end of Gross' dalliance with radio except that a bit later the radio critic resigned and Gross was handed the job as radio editor because he was the only writer on staff who knew how to operate the radio.

Gross and his New York based rivals all eventually honed their craft to the point that they transcended the simple knack of telling what had happened on the air and, instead, were able to shed some light on how and why radio was affecting listeners. In one column, Gross asked his readers, if radio had

"A radio columnist is forced to be literate about the illiterate, witty about the witless, coherent about the incoherent . . . Still, warts and all, it's not a bad job."

existed since the beginning of time which events would listeners most want to hear from a supplied list. The top five, in order of request were: The Sermon on the Mount, The Three Wise Men as they followed the star, Moses proclaiming the Ten Commandments, The Creation, and The Flood. The question reveals a good deal about critic Ben Gross; the answers suggest much about radio listeners back in the day.

John Crosby came to radio criticism a few years after Ben Gross. Crosby, in a foreword to a collection of his columns, *Out of the Blue*, described his role as critic thus: "The worst aspect of the job is the monotony. Nothing resists criticism so strenuously as radio. A radio columnist is forced to be literate about the illiterate, witty about the witless, coherent about the incoherent . . . Still, warts and all, it's not a bad job."

It is rare when critics agree as strenuously as Harriet Van Horne and Jack Gould did in the spring and summer of 1946. During this period, both writers were championing *The Adventures of Superman* as the venerable children's series addressed issues of hatred and intolerance and juvenile delinquency. Both critics went out of their way to praise and encourage the direction taken by the program.

If radio had a soul, and meaning beyond its mere existence, it was usually the radio critic who fine tuned the kilocycle dial, cleared away the static and enabled audiences to more clearly hear the words being spoken.☛

Wrote 19 screenplays; 2 novels

Writer Aleen Leslie dies at 101; created 'Date with Judy' in 1941

Monica Lewis set for March election meeting



Veteran singer-actress Monica Lewis will be the guest speaker for the March 13th SPERDVAC election meeting at the Mid-Valley Library in North Hills in the San Fernando Valley.

Ms. Lewis worked on many radio variety shows and films with stars such as Red Skelton, Jack Webb and others, and she made many records over the years.

"She'll share her memories and stories of her career at the meeting while the ballots are being counted," monthly meetings chair Bobb Lynes said.

The meeting will be held at the Mid-Valley Library which is located at 16244 Nordhoff St., North Hills in the San Fernando Valley

The meeting begins at 12 noon and, as always, it is free and open to the public.

Aleen Leslie, screenwriter, novelist, playwright and old-time radio writer and producer, died in her home on February 2nd three days short of her 102nd birthday. She was born on February 5, 1908 when Theodore Roosevelt was President.

As a 17-year-old high school graduate she was too young to attend college so when her parents insisted she get out of the house she wangled a position with the *Pittsburg Press* as an assistant to the society editor. Aleen's private interview with Alexander Wolcott thrilled her more than any other.

After a three-year stint at Ohio State, interrupted by the Great Depression, she became secretary for the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment. Not long after she began a weekly column titled, "One Girl Chorus" for the *Pittsburg Press* filling Westbrook Pegler's slot. While continuing to write it, she moved to Hollywood and quickly talked her way into Columbia Studios to begin writing two-reelers for the Three Stooges.

Becoming one of perhaps two dozen women screenwriters in the Industry, she ultimately worked at every studio in Hollywood and had 19 credited movies to her name. Among her produced scripts were *Father Was a Fullback* with Fred MacMurray, Maureen O'Hara and young Natalie Wood; *The Doctor Takes a Wife* with Ray Milland and Loretta Young; and *Father Is a Bachelor* with

William Holden.

Just before the Screen Writers Guild (SWG) became the Writers Guild of America (WGA), Ms. Leslie was its vice-president for a six-month term.



Although she dated the Epstein brothers (*Casablanca*) and the Kanin brothers (*Born Yesterday* and *The Philadelphia Story*), she claimed that marrying a Hollywoodian would be too chancy. She instead imported a husband from her hometown; a lawyer from Pittsburgh he became the distinguished entertainment attorney Jacques Leslie.

In the forties Aleen also created the radio show *A Date with Judy* for actress Helen Mack, who decided she was too old to play a teenager and so directed the broadcasts while Ms. Leslie wrote and produced them.

Aleen remained proud of the fact that during the Red Scare she hired blacklisted writers.

A very generous person, who made countless and ample charitable donations, she gave grants to playwrights who hadn't yet had plays produced if she liked their first acts.

She also wrote two novels *The Scent of the Roses* and *The Windfall* plus a multitude of plays, some produced at The Pasadena Playhouse as well as theatres in New York and San Francisco.

She continued to receive fan mail until her death.

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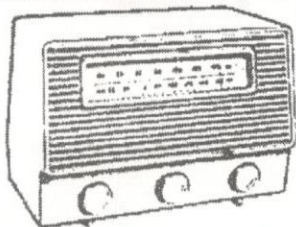
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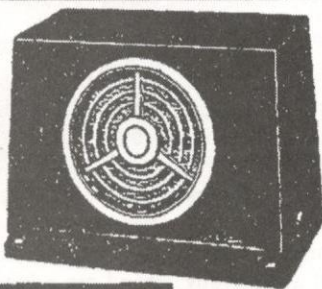
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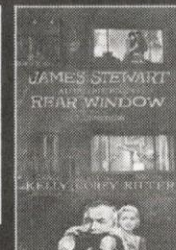
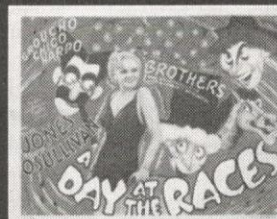
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On The Airlines

FRIDAY

5:45 p.m.—WPAS-CBS: Curt Massey and Martha Tilton get together for "Music, Music, Music," on "Curt Massey Time." They wind up the week's programs with a "Western Medley" of old favorites.

7 p.m.—WPAY-CBS: Senator Herbert H. Lehman, Dr. David de Sola Pool, rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City, and Sam Jaffe, of stage and screen, will take part in a special Passover program. The program is being presented in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee.

9 p.m.—NBC: Olivia De Havilland plays a set of identical twins in "The Dark Mirror," a whodunit mixing homicide and psychiatry, on "Screen Directors' Playhouse." This is an adaptation of the film in which the actress starred three seasons ago.

9:30 p.m.—Mutual: Stage, screen and radio stars Marsha Hunt, Jay Jostyn and Louis Allbritton co-star in "The Feminine Touch," in the hour-long production of the "Hollywood Radio Theatre."

SATURDAY

4:15 P.M.—WPAY-CBS: The Columbia Broadcasting System will launch its 1950 radio coverage of the nation's top horse races with a description of the Paumonok Handicap from Jamaica Track. Joe Palmer, New York Herald-Tribune turf writer, will start his fourth season as CBS' racing broadcaster with his call of the Paumonok.

6:30 p.m.—NBC: Arturo Toscanini will conduct Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Falstaff," in concert form as the final presentation of his 13th season with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. The complete opera will be given in two parts, half each week.

6:30 p.m.—Mutual: Rex Harrison, stage and screen star, will be the interview guest of entertainment and personality reporter Radie Harris when she presents her broadcast at this time.

9 p.m.—WPAY-CBS: A chocolate malted, a woman's privilege and a singing bug add up to a desperate gun battle in the "Case of the Reluctant Wheeler," to be dramatized by "Gangbusters." Jack Harvill, Chief of Detectives of the Detroit Police Department, narrates the drama, which tells how a large gang of clever bandits plagued Detroit by striking often and with lightning speed.

SUNDAY

7 p.m.—WPAY-CBS: Al Jolson, the old minstrel and roving singing star on CBS, sparks the fun with his songs on "The Jack Benny Program." Mary Livingston, Phil Harris, Rochester, Dennis Day and Don Wilson are among the supporting gagsters.

Radio In Review

By JOHN CROSBY

By Gum And By Jingoos!

TITUS MOODY, Fred Allen's old alley-mate and conceivably the most pungent character ever created for radio, is back on the air again, though not under that name.

Parker Fennelly now is playing a character called Mr. Feathers who is almost identical to the old Titus but is minus Titus' mordant, distinctive humor. (Titus, you'll recall, is the man who couldn't sleep because he had short eyelids.)

As Mr. Feathers in a comedy of the same name, Mr. Fennelly is the doggonedest New England type anywhere on the air. The program is explosive with Yankee exclamations—how somevers, doggone-its, by-gums and by jingoos. The conversation not only of Mr. Feathers but of everyone on the show is as archaic as a clipper ship and wonderfully refreshing.

"Come on, Norbert," says Mr. Feathers, racing the throttle of his 30-year-old car, "we're wastin' fuel."

—|—

THE PROSE STYLE, in short, always is more grandiloquent than the issue under discussion quite warrants. It reminds me of that perfect New England sentence from J.P. Marquand's *The Late George Apley*.

In that book, Apley once wrote his son in an excess of alarm: "There's no longer any dodging the fact that your mother's rubber plant is too heavy for the conservatory roof."

Mr. Feathers plays the part of a fussy, shrewd, old attendant in a pharmacy—no, not a drugstore, a pharmacy—in a small mythical New England village called Pike City. Virtually everyone in Pike City is as full of crotchets as your maiden great-aunt and as lovable as all get-out.

—|—

THE PROBLEMS that afflict this tiny, age-encrusted community are not large. Mr. Feathers finally conquers his prejudices and purchases a car, a contraption he always has distrusted. Or the town is invaded by one of them new-fangled drugstores with city ways.

That is to say that all the ointments in it are "new and improved," the pills are "all-purpose pills," it sells toasters and books and a lot of other gol darn rubbish which got no business in a drugstore.

Mr. Feathers is properly horrified to

discover that the new varmint even stoops to advertising on the radio—"Speedway Cut Rate Drugs Where Your Dollar Buys Much More."

—|—

IN AN EFFORT to combat the inroads of this depraved institution, Mr. Feathers takes to the radio himself with a quiz show and a super jumbo jackpot which he contrives to give to a small boy whose father is in want.

He even acts as his own emcee and you can tell he has listened to a lot of them fellers on the radio. "Don't applaud, folks. Jes' send me a load of coal. I was born in the water shortage so the feller says what makes you such a drip."

As you can see, "Mr. Feathers" is mildly satirical of big city ways, as wholesome as spring water, and, just possibly, a little too innocuous to stand the competition of the more supercharged comedians.

—|—

IT ISN'T a big laugh show and doesn't aim to be. It's full of small chuckles which the rural audience, I imagine, will find very satisfying. We big city folk will consider it a little mild for our neuroses.

I'm afraid, though, I can't tell you where to find Mr. Feathers at the moment. It has been moved out of its old time spot (Mutual 9 p.m. E.S.T. Wednesdays) and will be back shortly on Mutual at some other time. Just when I don't know and neither does Mutual.

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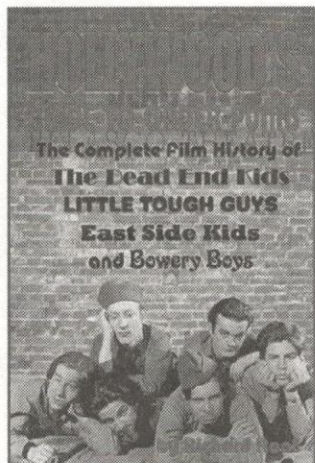
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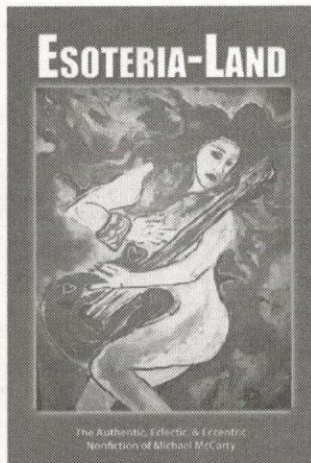
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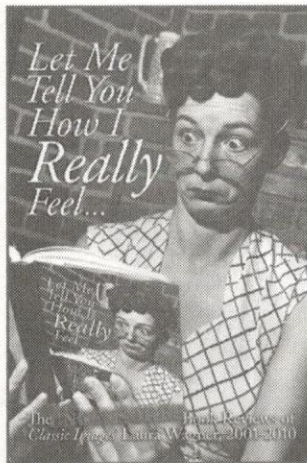
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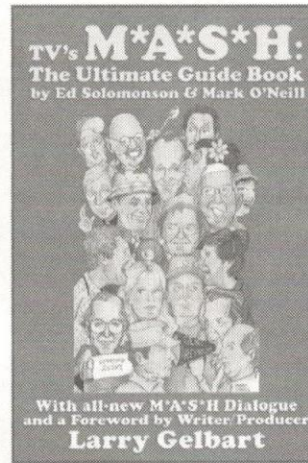
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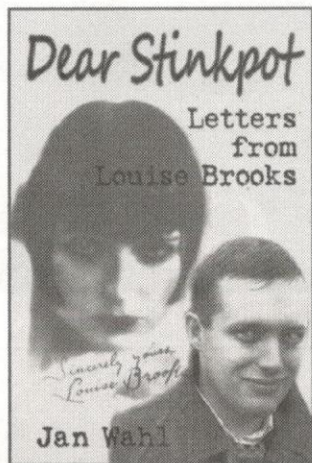
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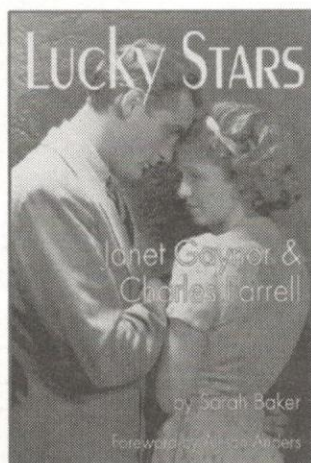
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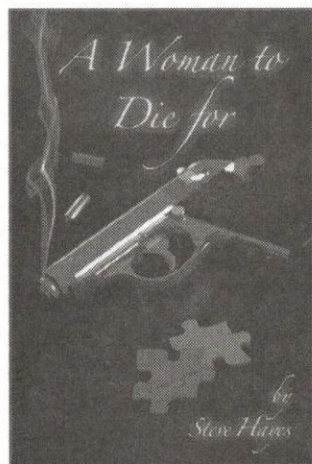
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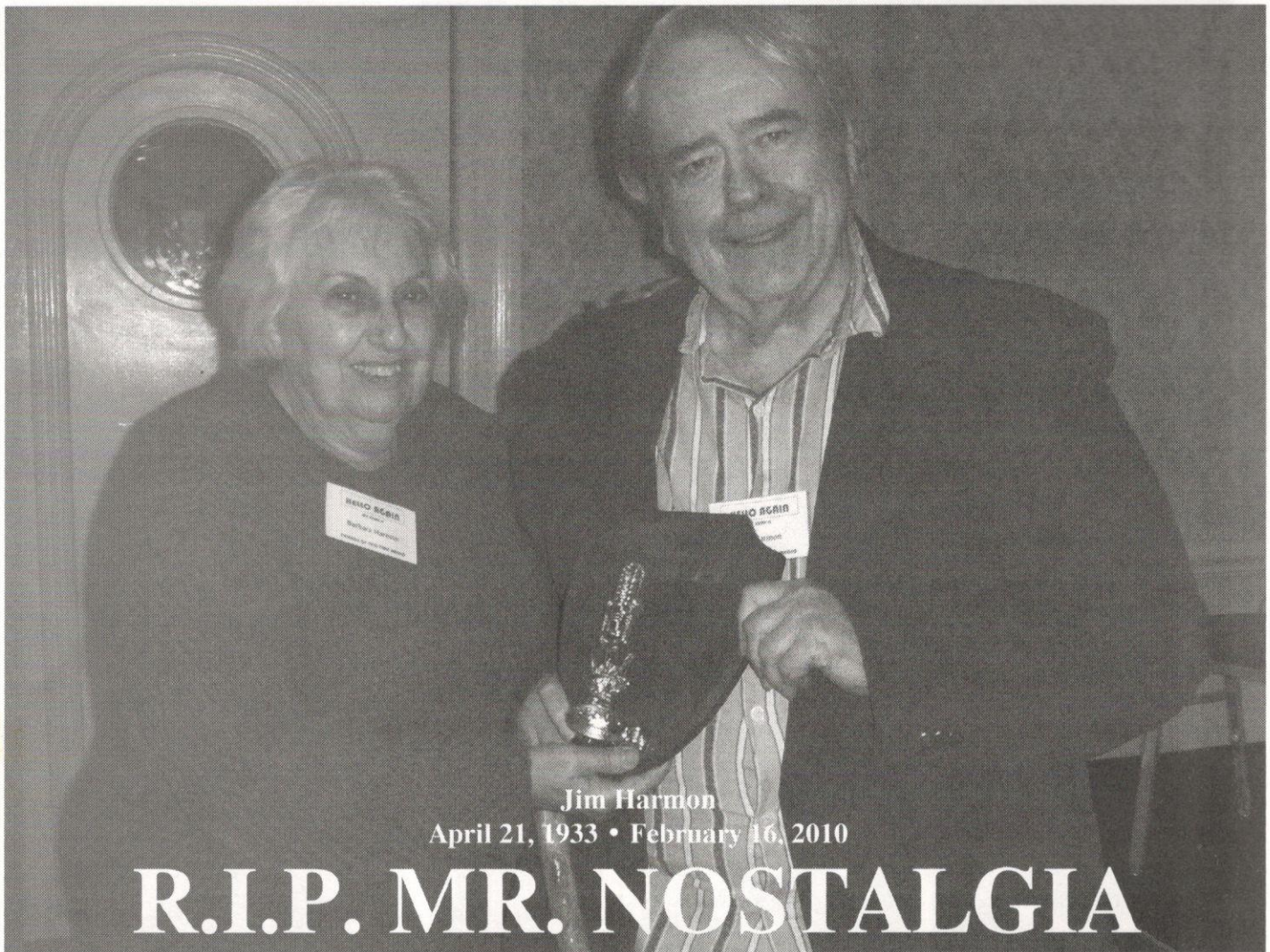
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Jim Harmon
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R.I.P. MR. NOSTALGIA

Jim and Barbara Harmon admiring the Ray Stannich Award at the Friends of Old-Time Radio convention in Newark, NJ October 24, 2009

Author and OTR expert Jim Harmon, one of radio's best friends and a former member of SPERDVAC's board of directors, has died. He was 77.

Jim died of heart failure on February 16 at his home. He was awaiting heart surgery on March 8, but according to his widow, Barbara, Jim confided that he didn't think he could last that long, and he told her that he was contented and that he had accomplished what he had planned in his life.

James Judson Harmon was born April 21, 1933 in Mt. Carmel, IL. A lifelong fan of Tom Mix and science fiction, Jim sold his first science fiction story to *Spaceway* magazine in 1954. He subsequently authored 40 stories throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

His best known work, however, was the book-length homage to old-time radio titled *The Great Radio Heroes*. Published in 1967 the book is recognized by many as the impetus for what is known today as OTR and added to the 1970s nostalgia craze. He followed up with *The Great Radio Comedians* in 1970 and the recently published *Radio Adventure and Mystery*.

With Donald Glut, Jim also authored the first booklength appreciation of movie serials called *The Great Movie Serials: Their Sound and Fury* in 1972 and later teamed with Glut again for *The Great Television Heroes* in 1975. With such works he was soon known as "Mr. Nostalgia."

Jim was also a devotee of Carlton Morse's *I Love a Mystery*, for which he wrote and produced new aural adventures of Jack, Doc and Reggie.

Jim will be cremated and his ashes buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, CA. Barbara had tried to get a burial site close to that of Tom Mix (Jim's childhood idol) but Mix is buried in the old section of Forest Lawn, which is now closed to additional burials. So Jim's ashes will be put to rest in a grave site in the new section. Jerry Williams of SPERDVAC is creating a special urn for Jim's remains.

No public funeral service will be held in connection with burial but a memorial service is planned sometime in the next three to five weeks. Barbara said that she will provide more details plans become firm.

In lieu of flowers, donations should be made in Jim's name to SPERDVAC at Manhattan Beach address (see page 14). Cards of support will reach Barbara Harmon at the residence she and Jim shared for many years: 634 S. Orchard Drive, Burbank, CA 91506-2905. She has also provided her home phone number (818-843-5472) in the event Jim's friends would rather call her.

Our thanks to Jack French for supplying much of the above information. We had received the following article at the end of last year, and it may well be the final words written by Jim. It is a personal narrative of Jim and Barbara's visit to the Friends of Old-Time Radio convention in Newark in October 2009—35 years after his last visit.

We dedicate this issue to our good friend and "Mr. Nostalgia," Jim Harmon.

“HARMONY”

by Jim Harmon

There are all sorts of media conventions, many inspired by our science fiction conventions. It was easy to see if you could hold a convention mostly about pulp magazines or comic books. Or you could get away from print and have conventions concerning movies and TV—horror films, western films, silent films. You could even do a convention for those interested in plays but how could you do a convention about something you couldn't see—dramatized radio.

I don't think this subject has been thoroughly researched but perhaps the earliest radio convention was held in Newark, NJ by a group of fans calling themselves the Friends of Old-Time Radio or FOTR. That was 35 years ago.

I did not get around to attending their convention until about 25 years ago, around the turn of this century. I would have to look up the exact year but it was around then. I enjoyed myself, but a trip to the East Coast from the West Coast is an expensive proposition.

Last year there were hints there was something special for me if I attended the FOTR convention. Barbara and I had not spent any money on an expensive vacation in some time, and she said we should go. But one problem for me is that I can walk hardly any distance, which makes it's difficult for me to traverse airports. I like to use those powered carts some airports have but I often have to have an attendant push me in a wheel-chair from entrance to the right gate for departure. I don't like using a wheelchair, but I don't brood on it.

We wanted to leave from our local Bob Hope Airport in Burbank so we had to take US Airways with a stopover in Phoenix. They lifted me—wheel-chair and all—on a private elevator to a special right-hand door in the pilot's cabin. I could walk to my seat to meet Barbara. We got a free coffee but no food on this short flight.

In Phoenix there was a powered cart holding up to six people that was more comfortable and faster than the manually pushed chair. On this four hour flight on to Newark there was supposed to be food for purchase. From the menu we carefully selected a pastrami sandwich for Barbara and a salami and crackers snack for me. By the time the stewardess and her push cart got to us all that was left was a

package of potato chips and a bag of trail mix. Flying is becoming a more dangerous business. Starvation is a hard way to go.

After deplaning at Newark I got an assist from a wheelchair, but not to where we had to go to get the shuttle to the Newark Holiday Inn. I had to do some walking to get to an air train monorail that took up another terminal and a pick up point for cabs and shuttles.

At five in the afternoon we walked into the Inn and the convention in session. We paid our fee for attending, \$375 for the two of us, and were immediately ushered into where one of the nightly banquets was being held. As we took our seats, permanent convention chair Jay Hickerson, went on the public address system and announced Jim Harmon, author of *The Great Radio Heroes*, to applause and then fellow author and fan, Barbara Harmon, to more applause.

Our table guest was a blind woman with a seeing-eye dog. She was delighted to meet two authors. In fact, we found she was delighted at everything. She seemed bi-polar and stuck on the up cycle. It was just remarkable rather than irritating. She seemed a nice person. Her dog seemed to love me on sight as I must admit many dogs do—other than the one Barbara brought for our house. The dog climbed all over my legs under the table (but not what you're thinking!) and licked my hands. I think he was supposed to be “on duty” and at parade rest. Because of my faulty legs, I asked Barbara to please get a buffet plate for me. “Stay!” the woman said. I presumed she was telling me to remain and let Barbara do the work. But of course she was talking to the dog. Later she said “I would never command you in that imperious tone.”

The food was great with a fruit cup to begin, roast chicken, beefsteak, trout, veggies and, for dessert, a slice of chocolate cake.

There were tea and coffee and something I have never seen before—pitchers of iced Coca-Cola on the table. The next night, the food was not so great; we had no fruit cup, a smaller selection of entrees and, for dessert, a rice pudding that tasted awful, an opinion affirmed by the many people who left it on the table. I figured the hoteliers tried to make a good impression on the first night and then came the economy chapter, and then they attempted to redeem themselves on the final night with chicken and roast beef and a slice of carrot cake.

I knew we had arrived unavoidably too late for both Barbara and me to take part in the Author's Panel. I had also contacted Craig Wichman about doing a part in his dramatic presentations. He said there was an opening, but again we arrived too late to do the rehearsal. However, we were in time to see his presentation after dinner. He did a condensed *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* that had featured Henry Fonda. When he first came on as Lincoln there was a suggestion of Fonda that mostly faded as the play went on with his excellent, professional interpretation. Speaking with him afterward, Craig said he had dropped Fonda after the introduction but I seemed to hear a suggestion of Fonda throughout. I told Craig that if I had been able to do the part of a townsman I could have seen Abe off to Springfield by shouting out, “Goodbye, Mr. Fonda!” Barbara told Craig that she could see my old joke coming. “He did do a twist on the ‘Goodbye, Mr. Massey’ story,” Wichman said.

There was the usual flurry of greetings from friends and meeting a few new ones, and then off to bed.

The next day I had arranged to make an appearance with the prolific radio historian Martin Grams, Jr. and his well-known asso-

One original performer was on hand mid-day Saturday, doing what he has done for so many years, and that was Joe Franklin.

ciate, Terry Salomonson, who were doing a PowerPoint presentation on *The Green Hornet*. They had collected a wonderful selection of Hornet visuals, including the first visual realizations of what the Hornet looked like, ordered by producer George W. Trendle, and of the Black Beauty car, sidekick Kato, and even the Hornet's gas gun. I stood back from their prearranged presentation but stepped in at the last to offer a postscript. I had had a long correspondence with Trendle when my book *The Great Radio Heroes* had come out. I had quoted some of the actors I had reached about how cheap Trendle was. I did put in some placating words in the paperback edition about how "Trendle had later been able to more adequately reward his actors"—after

the formation of the radio actors union forced him to do it. He had offered to reward me for this.

First I asked him if I could borrow a 16mm print of then unobtainable *Green Hornet* movie serial. "I never liked that film and I didn't keep it," he said. Then I asked if he still had any examples of the radio premium ring that imprinted the seal of the Hornet. He said he hadn't because "we [had given] away all of those rings to the boys and girls of America." I got the idea that I could keep asking for things forever, and not even be able to get five bucks until pay day.

I told the story I had heard from actress Lee Allman ("Miss Case") that she thought the actor playing Kato was spying on high naval officers at the restaurant he also ran in private life near the Detroit Navy base. "He just vanished the day after Pearl Harbor" she said. Grams had some more exact information and it was about two months later so her memory was not entirely accurate. Undoubtedly he was sent to some "re-location base" for Japanese citizens. We know the vast majority of those people were loyal to America, but one or two may have had divided loyalties.

I also brought up a subject that I probably drag out too often at events like this, and that is that I am the first cousin once removed of Brace Beemer, who played the Lone Ranger. Since according to the story line the Lone Ranger and Brit Reid are related, that must make me the second cousin of the Green Hornet.

Later, Salomonson was very intent on getting photographs of the three of us together. This inspired a number of fans nearby to get

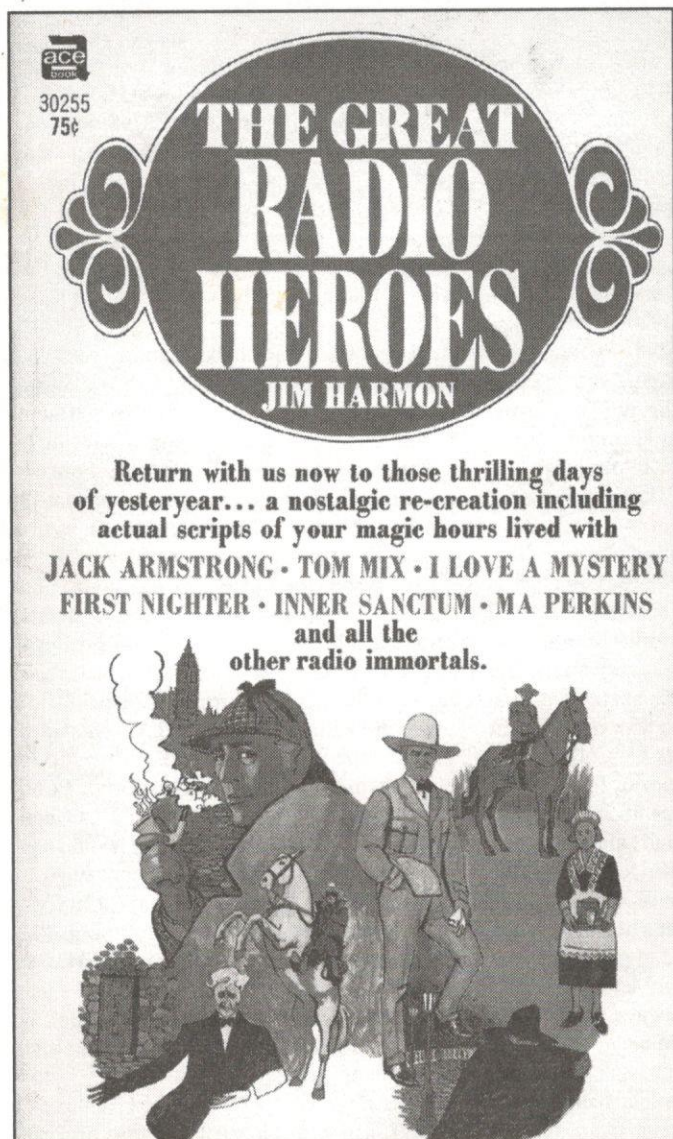
photos of us as well.

Later in the afternoon there was a panel with Edgar Farr Russell III, Craig Wichman, and others in a very scholarly discussion of the similarities between Edgar Allan Poe and Abraham Lincoln, both born on the same day that Barbara particularly applauded. The Poe theme would continue after a panel on comedy with Carmel Quinn who sang on *Arthur Godfrey Time*, and Betsy Palmer, radio-TV actress, still remarkably beautiful at 83. A complete show of *The Life of Riley* reprised a presentation of how Los Angeles SPERDVAC club with Bobb Lynes as Riley, Barbara Watkins as his wife, and Tommy Cook, the original actor in the role of their son, Junior. This performance seemed slightly smoother than the first one.

Poe next haunted "The House of Usher" featuring a younger announcer, mostly from TV, Michael Gwynne who has a wonderful radio voice in the tradition of Fred Foy. Ninety-four-year-old star of *Terry and the Pirates* Cliff Carpenter portrayed a servant called upon to read beautifully a poem of Poe's that was supposedly composed by Roderick Usher.

The big evening presentation was of *The Great Gildersleeve* with Chuck McCann as Gildy, a man of great talents and impromptu wit who had worked with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, sometimes being W.C. Fields for them. The Southern Belle, Lila Ransom, played by Shirley Mitchell was in the cast. It is wonderful to see and hear these actors doing their original roles after some 60 years, but time is taking its toll and we may have none of the original performers to entertain and amuse us for not many more years.

One original performer was on hand mid-day Saturday, doing what he has done for so many years, and that was Joe Franklyn. Joe has been the host of a number of radio and TV series concerned with such nostalgic subjects as Al Jolson, Broadway musicals, old movies and old radio. I had been on his WOR-TV show 41 years before and I told him so. "I'm sure you remember me," I said with a smile and Joe Franklyn nodded. "The radio man. How are you, Jim?" I think he did remember me. This time, as he had done 41 years before, he called on me more than anyone else during the panel of guests, that included Mary Owen, the daughter of Donna Reed; Cherie Becker, widow of Sandy Becker; and Lillian Murphy, an associate of Irving Berlin and Sigmund Romberg. I told Mary Owen very few women were accomplished enough to get her name as the title of a TV show, as her mother had, and she seemed pleased. I found it hard to believe Sandy Becker had said on the air so many dirty remarks as a bloop video seemed to reveal. Surely these were out-takes from rehearsals. Did he really say on air as he displayed an



The 1967 paperback edition that started it all.

Erector Set that he had really enjoyed his first erections? Mrs. Murphy talked of her husband, ill in a wheelchair in the audience, had produced operettas on TV such as Nelson Eddy in *Desert Song*, which I had just obtained on a DVD from a specialist dealer. I was reminded to tell the story of what Chicago radio actor Curley Bradley—Tom Mix—had told me of *The Chicago Theatre of the Air*. Chicago Tribune publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormack, gave a five-minute talk on patriotic subjects each week. One week during Lincoln's birthday the blustering caricature that was McCormack, ponderously recited the Lincoln's Birthday Address: "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth . . ." He paused on completion. "Weren't those inspiring words? Let's hear them again. "Four score . . ." Producer Jack LaFondre furiously began striking out line after line of dialogue in the script to make the show get off on time.

Four decades later, Joe Franklin looked virtually the same; not a line in his face. He started to leave the small stage and someone warned him that there were no steps at the end where he was headed. He shrugged and jumped down three feet. Later I learned he is 83.

Earlier that same day, they did a re-creation of *The Saint* with Simon Jones, star of the BBC radio drama, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Jones was excellent but the script was a dated cliché with a Brooklyn cab driver prominent nonetheless excellently played. At dinner, Jay Hickerson announced that next year's convention would begin a day earlier than this one. I said "Thank God we won't have to wait a whole year for it." The sophisticated Britisher Simon Jones laughed at my line and smiled and nodded. A real sophisticate laughed at one of the jokes of this small town boy!

As dinner went on, a number of awards were given, including one to Richard Hurd for his many acting credentials. Finally, old friend and fellow Tom Mix radio researcher and former FBI agent and author of such books as *Private Eyelashes* (about female private detectives on radio) presented an award to me for first recording the history of popular radio, and then doing something to revive that form of radio. I made a speech thanking everyone for it. "Maybe I'll be back in 25 years if you have another award for me." I forgot how old I was. In 25 years, I would be 102 years.

The final event of the evening was a re-enactment of *The Green Lama*, directed by Anthony Tollin, foremost authority on *The Shadow* and competing pulp heroes such as *The Green Lama*. Michael Gwynne returned as the lama. Chuck McCann's ad-libs as a Tibetan servant brought the play nearly to a

stop but they got through it. I asked Tollin if he were upset that the play did not turn out as a drama rather than a spoof. He said after it started to fall apart with an inappropriate sound effect he felt it'd better just to go for the laughs.

Next day, Sunday, was the last event of the convention, and I had overslept and had to rush down to be on an impromptu panel with Mike Gwynne, Richard Hurd, Tommy Cook, Cliff Carpenter, and his wife, Jean Rouverol, who had played "Betty" on *One Man's Family* and had written some of the scripts when the show was in its last days as a Monday through Friday strip. Hurd talked the most during this panel, telling among other things that he had heard that Hugh Hefner was seeking recordings of *I Love a Mystery*, and he happened to have three which got him permanent access to the Playboy Mansion with twenty-four hour chef service and hot and cold running girls. I brought up the fact that I had released into radio fandom virtually all of the ILAM that had ever turned up, borrowing Carlton E. Morse's collection of discs and transferring them to tape in 1960, and I had never been invited to the Playboy Mansion. Afterwards, the son of *I Love Lucy* producer and an active convention event producer in his own right Gregg Oppenheimer whispered to me that Hef had called but my wife, Barbara, had saved me from that insidious den by not relaying the message.

For the rest of our last full day in the Newark-New York City area Barbara and I took a complicated series of vehicles into New York and joined the CityLights tour-bus. The guide on the public address system was around our age, and knew everything. He pointed out the building where from his apartment above a Foot Locker store, Heath Ledger ("Joker" Oscar winner) was removed as a corpse. The guide saw it happen. Something new, something old. He pointed to a tavern where George Washington had eaten and drank. Then there was Macy's, Wall Street, Empire State Building, Ground Zero, and the Brooklyn Bridge. The bus took us down by the docks where we saw ancient sailing ships, white broadsides unfurled. I hadn't known

there were any left besides Old Ironsides in Boston. For the last few blocks we had to switch to another tour bus and there the guide was young, flippant and obnoxious. The older guide was much more sympatico and really made the trip.

Barbara wanted some New York style pizza. A place called Villa Stromboli was recommended to us. It was on the walk from where the tour bus stopped to the pickup point

for the city bus that returned us to the Newark airport. The pizza was fine, three inches thick with cheese and toppings. But with my stomach full, I found the walking even more difficult and I barely made it to the bus.

At the airport we had to take an air train monorail back to another part of the airport where we took the shuffle back to the Holiday Inn convention hotel.

After a night's sleep we did it all over again in re-

verse to get the plane that began our return to Burbank.

Our daughter, Dawn, had given us a disturbing call that our 16-year old kitty, Pamela, was missing. We immediately began calling for her when we got home. To our relief Pamela answered us but would not come to us. She seemed caught under a big-doored chest and for how long we weren't sure. Some of her food was gone, and she had left deposits in her sandbox. Even though dead tired, if my kitty was in danger the adrenalin began pumping and I removed all the things in and on that chest including very heavy 16-inch recordings of old radio shows, boxes of books and magazines. Finally, I was able to lift the chest and Pamela ran out. She was scared and ran off to hide somewhere else. But at the end of the evening she came out and slept on my chest as usual.

I was home.♣

SUSPENSE

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GENERAL CATALOG • REEL 988

'Same Time, Same Station' Returns

by Larry and John Gassman

We are John and Larry Gassman.

Some of you may remember us from the old-time radio hobby. We began in 1970 collecting shows. In 1972 we met Jerry Haendiges who at the time lived 10 minutes from us in Whittier. We began working in radio in 1973. We eventually got involved in 1974 with SPERDVAC, the old-time radio organization in Southern California. Later, Larry served as its president for six years. He also chaired 13 of their old-radio conventions in Los Angeles. Our first old radio show broadcast of *Same*



Larry Gassman

Time, Same Station began in 1980. We worked for 20 years for KPCC in Pasadena and for 15 years for Bill Bragg and Yesterday USA. We also worked for a year at KCSN Northridge in 2001. Larry got married in 2002 and for a variety of reasons—work related mostly—we stopped working in radio and left the radio hobby. Over the last eight years we have done several on-line radio related symposia for *Radio Out of the Past*.

Beginning on February 7 2010, we are again hosting a radio show called *Same Time Same Station*, which will be heard initially on the old-time radio network at <http://www.vintageradioplac.com/broadcast/>.

We have been asked by others to also carry the on-line broadcast and we are still working out the logistics, and hope to announce something soon. We thank Jerry Haendiges for hosting the show. It was in very good hands during the time we were away.

Our plans are very simple. We will play the old radio shows, plus many of our earlier interviews done since 1980.

We also plan to record new interviews with radio performers plus those involved

Same Time, Same Station can be heard in three different places.

1. It streams for a week before a new show will appear at <http://www.vintageradioplac.com/>
2. It will also be heard at 8 p.m. Eastern-5 p.m. Pacific on Bill Sparks Oldies stream. <http://stations.ultrastreams.us:9655/listen.pls>
3. The program is also heard at 3 p.m. Eastern, noon Pacific, at: Yesterday USA. http://www.live365.com/cgi-bin/mini.cgi?station_name=yesterdayusa1&site=pro&tm=9484.

with new radio books and other radio related projects.

So we invite you to spread the word.

You can reach us both through e-mail at Larry: Lgsinger@sbcglobal.net and John: JohnGassman@roadrunner.com. You can also find us at the following networking sites: Skype: Larry.Gassman; John.Gassman. Twitter: Larry: Lgsinger John: Vibrant Voice. Face Book: Larry Gassman; John Gassman

Thank you all in advance for your support. As radio enthusiasts, we are a relatively small group in this hobby. We are not here to compete with anyone. The more we help each other the more we spread the word about old-time radio in general.



John Gassman

LARRY AND I have been doing radio for over 20 years. We work for a non-commercial NPR station in Pasadena. Through KPCC we have an opportunity to play the old-time radio shows for an appreciative audience throughout most of Southern California. The show is also syndicated on two public radio stations in Northern California, KCHO Chico and KFPR Redding. Actually it has become a show heard throughout the world thanks to the Internet.

I don't consider Larry or myself unique. But we are probably the only set of identical blind twins doing radio today. Fortunately, our parents never stopped us from trying

new things. We've adapted to situations all of our lives.

We grew up listening to radio in Los Angeles from about 1960 onward. And I guess we always wanted to become involved. From 1973 through June of 1975 we worked at the junior College station at Rio Hondo College in Whittier and later at other public stations.

When Woody Schultz, the original host of *Same Time, Same Station*, moved away in 1980 he gave us his show at KPCC. Most of the time we record the show at home and mail it into the station. However when we fundraise for KPCC or interview one

of the many stars from an old-time radio program, we do the show live.

Over the course of 20 years we have been fortunate to have done over 400 interviews. Some of our guests have included Stan Freberg, Norman Corwin, Steve Allen, Robert Trout, Les Tremayne, McDonald Carey, George Fenneman, André Baruch, Bea Wain, Carlton E. Morse, Cleve Hermann, June Foray, Parley Baer, Ralph Bell, and Himan Brown. We even reunited the cast of radio's *Space Patrol* both in studio as well as via phone around the United States.

In October of 1992 the television show *America's Most Wanted* did a show on how the radio crime shows of the 1930s influenced crime prevention. We did our show live that Sunday evening and set up interviews with

Portions of this article originally appeared in the February 3, 2000 edition of Don Barrett's Daily radio column at <http://www.laradio.com>.

actors who appeared on those particular broadcasts. *Same Time, Same Station* was video taped and portions were used on the *America's Most Wanted* program.

Most of the time we play the shows from the Golden Age of Radio. But from time to time we also interview authors of recently written books about old-time radio. When Joan Benny's book came out about her dad Jack Benny she was nice enough to spend a couple of hours with us. When Gregg Oppenheimer co-wrote a book with his dad, the late Jess Oppenheimer, we spent a wonderful Sunday night talking about Lucille Ball as well as the other facets of the life of Jess Oppenheimer.

We also believe in encouraging new-time radio drama as well. In 1989 we aired Peggy Webber's *California Artists Radio Theater*. Peggy's cast is made up of many of the giants of radio and television. Most recently we welcomed *The Wells Fargo Radio Theater* to our program. The new shows are produced and directed by Newell and Rosemary Alexander. They are recorded at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage.

When we record a show from home, the only special equipment we use is a talking clock capable of timing segments down to the last second. We also now use a computer in our research. The computer uses special software, which translates anything on the screen into speech. Most sighted people take for granted the everyday tasks of typing a document such as the one you are currently reading. Add to that the ability to now edit and proofread that same document. I can now surf the web and research or read a newspaper. To me as a blind person it is one of the most exciting things that I have ever experienced.

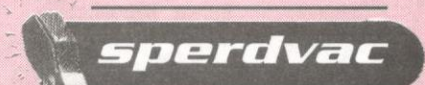
One of the lucky breaks that occurred as a result of working with KPCC was the opportunity to broadcast the Rose Parade both locally and around the country via National Public Radio. We did the broadcast specifically for those without sight. But we also had lots of positive feedback from sighted friends and listeners. In each of the four broadcasts, we would visit the floats in November and at about that same time someone would record the information from the press packet for us. We would then go back and edit the material and Braille what we believed would be of the most interest. Time constraints within the parade proved to be the most important criteria.

Just think about listening to Chick Hearn and Stu Lantz doing a Lakers Game. Stu literally has just a few seconds to comment on what has just happened. Larry and I literally had about 20 to 30 seconds to introduce the float, band or equestrian unit and give a few details before the next entry came along. We thought it was important to keep up with the pace of the parade. We emphasized what the floats felt and smelled like. Although we did some description of the flowers, we didn't have time to dwell on them.

Interspersed in our commentary we dropped in brief recorded New Year's greetings from the Queen and Her court as well as the President of the Tournament of Roses plus the Grand Marshal and the Mayor of Pasadena.

We were always over-prepared because you never could tell when a breakdown would occur, necessitating lots of ad-lib and fill material. We've never had any trouble talking so somehow we got through it all okay. Perhaps one of the most difficult situations occurred when during the course of the parade our fingers would freeze up. Remember that we were sitting about sixty feet up in the broadcast gallery and temperatures would usually get down to the low forties or high thirties. Frozen fingers meant that reading Braille notes was almost impossible. So while one of us was talking about the entry the other was quickly rubbing his hands together to warm them up.

Now neither of us as it turns out are rocket scientists or as Jim Healy used to say USC Brain Surgeons. So by the time our third broadcast was under way, our program director had the bright idea of bringing along a heating pad and fortunately it worked. Evidently the broadcast of the Rose Parade, which is a very visual event as done by two blind people attracted a lot of attention because we got local as well as national radio, television and print coverage. ♣



MEETING SCHEDULE
2010

THE 2010 SPERDVAC MONTHLY MEETING SCHEDULE

ALL DATES ARE CONFIRMED

March 13 • Election Meeting
GUEST SPEAKER
MONICA LEWIS
Mid-Valley Library • North Hills

•

May 8
South Pasadena Community Room

•

June 12
Mid-Valley Library • North Hills

•

September 11
Mid-Valley Library • North Hills

•

October 9
South Pasadena Community Room

•

November 13
To Be Announced

FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION AND DETAILS ON OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS
PLEASE CALL OUR TOLL FREE NUMBER

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or check our website at sperdvac.org

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MURDER ON MARGIN
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FOR SALE

FOR SALE. Entire OTR collection on open reels and cassettes (approximately 3000 shows) plus a couple of hundred hours of 40s music. Great for a starter set for anyone interested in old-time radio. \$400. Contact Bill at wgrb@sbcglobal.net for more information.

FOR SALE. Extensive A&A video collection on VHS SP speed from best quality sources. 67 TV shows including first program with curtain call; 22 boxed VHS tapes. Also, A&A's 1960s cartoon Calvin & Colonel, 4 shows; 1930 movie Check & Double Check. 24 tapes, pp \$100. Robert G. Wheaton, 16015 White Fawn Dr., San Antonio, TX 78255 (210)-695-8430.

FOR SALE. 400 reel-to-reel tapes with old-time radio shows. Make me an offer I can't refuse. John Cooper, RR 1 Box 371, Clarksburg, WV 26301-9754. Phone 304-624-6724

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ON THE AIR 60 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH . . .

COMEDY

9 p.m.—WPAY-CBS: When Luigi decides to help the Big Brothers of America by playing foster brother to Danny, the newsboy, Pasquale accuses him of neglecting Rosa during "Life with Luigi," comedy starring J. Carrol Naish. Alan Reed plays Pasquale.

9:30 p.m.—NBC: Fibber McGee learns about building construction permits the hard way on the "Fibber McGee and Molly" program. Fibber builds a guest house adjoining 79 Wistful Vista then learns that anyone constructing a building must first obtain a building permit from the city authorities. Fibber's fury ferments when the city orders him to demolish the structure.

MYSTERY

7 p.m.—WPAY: "Counter-Spy," mystery show series, returns to the station this week, with broadcasts scheduled for the is time on every Tuesday and Thursday. The title of the first program is "The Case of the Juvenile Agent."

8 p.m.—WPAY: "Danger, Dr. Danfield" finds Dan and Rusty investigating a tunnel explosion which was at first thought to be an accident. Dan's association with the sand hogs provides the adventure.

10 p.m.—NBC: Editor Steve Wilson plays the part of a stranger in the city in order to uncover evidence against a group of confidence men in "Easy Money," adventure on "Big Town."

Acting from a tip from Police Inspector Callahan, Steve makes contact with the swindlers and appears to be taken in by their bunko scheme. He plays along with them up to the point where they try to separate him from his money, exposes the leader and hands the whole gang over to the authorities.

Edward Pawley portrays Editor Wilson and Fran Carlon is heard as his star reporter, Lorelei Kilbourne.

On your radio on the evening of Tuesday, March 14, 1950 in Portsmouth, OH, as printed in the Portsmouth Times from material syndicated by the New York Tribune.

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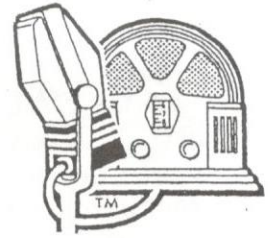
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