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CHUCK SCHADEN'S

NOSTALGIA DIGEST

AND
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GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-TWO

CHAPTER ONE

DECEMBER, 1995 -- JANUARY, 1996

Hello, Out There in Radioland!

After ten full years of evening and late-night broadcasts on WBBM, we decided to end our series of *Old Time Radio Classics* on December 1, 1995.

We feel the time is right for us to reduce our radio activity. We've been on the air with vintage radio broadcasts six or seven times a week for the better part of the last twenty-five years and we've been looking forward to having a little more free time and a little less responsibility.

It's not easy to make a decision to end a series that we have enjoyed and has been so well-received. The ratings told us that we were number one in our time period and our mail and telephone response was wonderful. Many people who could not stay up for the midnight show recorded the program for listening at a "more convenient hour."

The one thing that really concerned us about retiring from the WBBM show was the thought that we might be letting down our listeners.

We knew there were other old time radio shows available and we hoped WBBM would continue presenting vintage programming. That way those who had been tuning us in could still enjoy their favorite classic broadcasts.

WBBM told us, however, they would not replace *Radio Classics* and would, instead, expand their Newsradio 78 service for another hour.

But there's good news for late-night fans of old time radio.

We are pleased to tell you that Chicago radio station WMAQ has begun carrying the nationally syndicated series "When Radio Was" hosted by Stan Freberg.

WMAQ is a 50,000 watt clear-channel station with an excellent broadcast signal at 670 on the AM radio dial. Most of our WBBM listeners around the country should be able to receive WMAQ without difficulty.

"When Radio Was" is broadcast on WMAQ Monday thru Friday evenings from 11 p.m. to midnight, Chicago time.

As a service to our readers, the *Nostalgia Digest* now carries the calendar for "When Radio Was." The December-January schedule may be found on pages 24 and 25 of this issue.

We would like to thank you for listening to *Old Time Radio Classics* and let you know how much we have appreciated your support during the past ten years on WBBM and in all our broadcast endeavors.

We intend to continue with our Saturday afternoon *Those Were The Days* program on WNIB. It is our hope that *Those Were The Days* will go on forever -- or for as long as there are fans of old time radio.

Thanks for listening.

--Chuck Schaden

COVER STORY

GEORGE BURNS

Still Misbehavin' at 100

BY BILL OATES



Living 100 years is quite an accomplishment, not celebrated by most, yet *entertaining* for nine decades of that time is even more miraculous.

George Burns celebrates the centennial of his birth on January 20, 1996, and his durability as a performer via a variety of media is legendary.

Like so many phenomenal entertainers of the twentieth century, removed only a generation or two from their families' European roots, Nathan Birnbaum grew up on New York's Lower East Side at the turn into the twentieth century.

"Every one should have an East Side in their lives," said fellow resident Irving Berlin. Other show business personalities who shared growing up in a section of that famed city include Jimmy Durante, Jack Pearl, Fanny Brice, Milton Berle, and the Marx Brothers to name a few. Ferreting about the tenement-lined streets taught so many of the primarily Jewish performers how to survive under adverse conditions and aspire to the dreams that their parents or grandparents had in mind as they passed through Ellis Island.

Young Nathan, with not exactly the best attendance record at school, was forced to quit his education altogether to help sup-

Bill Oates, a high school English teacher from Indiana, is a regular contributor to these pages.

port his family at age seven when his father died. It was from this time onward that the first of his life long romances was born (the second, but not in significance, Gracie Allen, came into that world of grease paint numerous routines and partners later.)

George Burns bounded onto stage at an important time in American theatre. Placing a varied bill of acts was popularized (and made respectable for women and children) by Tony Pastor in the 1880's. By the turn into the new century rail lines crossed the nation, and circuits used them to send hundreds of acts—the good, the bad, and the mediocre—to any town with a stage (a Legion hall, music hall, or opera house.)

By 1913, the medium was so popular that lavish houses were built for audiences to experience the cream of the vaudeville crop. During vaudeville's growth period, George Burns had worked with Captain Bett's seal, a dog, alone, and with numerous partners. The New York Palace opened its doors in March of that year, giving a chance to make it into the big time to young acts like The Pee-wee Quartet (young Burns singing), the ballroom dancing act of Jose and Burns, Brown and Williams (Burns sometimes on roller skates as Brown, replacing a guy named Edwards who was Brown before), and the comedy of Burns and Loraine (both did impressions of then big time headliners.)

George Burns worked his way west on the Orpheum circuit and back east, but it was not until he teamed with a young Irish girl that he finally played B. F. Keith's New York Palace as the team of Burns and Allen in 1928. During that year they first played on a bill at that famed stage with long-time friend Jack Benny. The act was of the "dumb girl" variety (similar to the then popular Dumb Dora type newspaper comic strips like "Blondie"), and it was "in one" with a song and dance finish. Virtually they were the only mixed act of its kind to go from vaudeville to motion pictures to radio to television. "I think I loved being in vaudeville more than any part of my career,"



GEORGE BURNS AND GRACIE ALLEN

wrote Burns years later.

He must have forgotten that he sometimes had to set up folding chairs in the halls in which he played. It was the team's two-a-day billing at the Palace with Eddie Cantor that led to their first visit on Cantor's prestigious radio show.

Show business was part of Gracie Allen's family. She was born in San Francisco ten years after George. Her father was an entertainer and, with two other sisters, Gracie formed an act that became "Larry Reilly and Company." She was an accomplished Irish clog dancer, but not achieving great success, Gracie made plans to change careers at the time when the team of George

Burns and Billy Lorraine broke up. Ready to attempt any kind of show biz act, Burns was willing to try a man-woman team, like the successful team of Block and Sully, and Gracie was to be his "straight man." Fortunately, George realized early that Gracie's questions to George's jokes got bigger laughs, and so their roles were reversed.

This new husband and wife team hit the big time doing "two-a-days" in quality theatres, which meant dressing rooms with amenities like hot water. At the time the best vaudeville houses offered eight acts, and the best position meant the best money.

GEORGE BURNS CENTENNIAL

An MC held the show together with the fourth or fifth acts being the plum positions. The earliest acts suffered with a restless crowd, but the middle acts preceding intermission were most desirable, and the last acts were not enviable because they followed the sixth act, which was often an animal act.

Examples of Burns and Allen's vaudeville comedy style are evident in a number of motion pictures. As early as 1929 the team made the first of a dozen short subjects (the earliest was filmed at the New York Warner Brothers lot, and the rest were made for Paramount.) Not only do these early routines date from the vaudeville years, but George often wrote the material for the films as he had been doing for the stage. Of course, George's stock straight man and Gracie's illogic continued in their film as segments wholly Burns and Allen throughout the 1930's. Along with their famed dialogues on film is a vaudeville talent not fully realized on radio or television. The wonderful 1937 RKO film "A Damsel in Distress" had Fred Astaire teamed with hoofers George and Gracie. The husband and wife team kept up with the master dancer in several routines, not the least of which takes place on rides at a carnival.

Despite their success on film, George and Gracie's greatest medium was radio. Interestingly enough, it was on the BBC that the two first appeared on the air, when they were lured away from a vacation in England in 1930. NBC had turned down the comedy team during that year, stating that Gracie's voice was "too squeaky" for radio. After twenty-six weeks of vaudeville in Britain, they returned to New York to film most of their short subjects at Paramount's Astoria studio. (Coincidentally, the Marx Brothers were making "Ani-

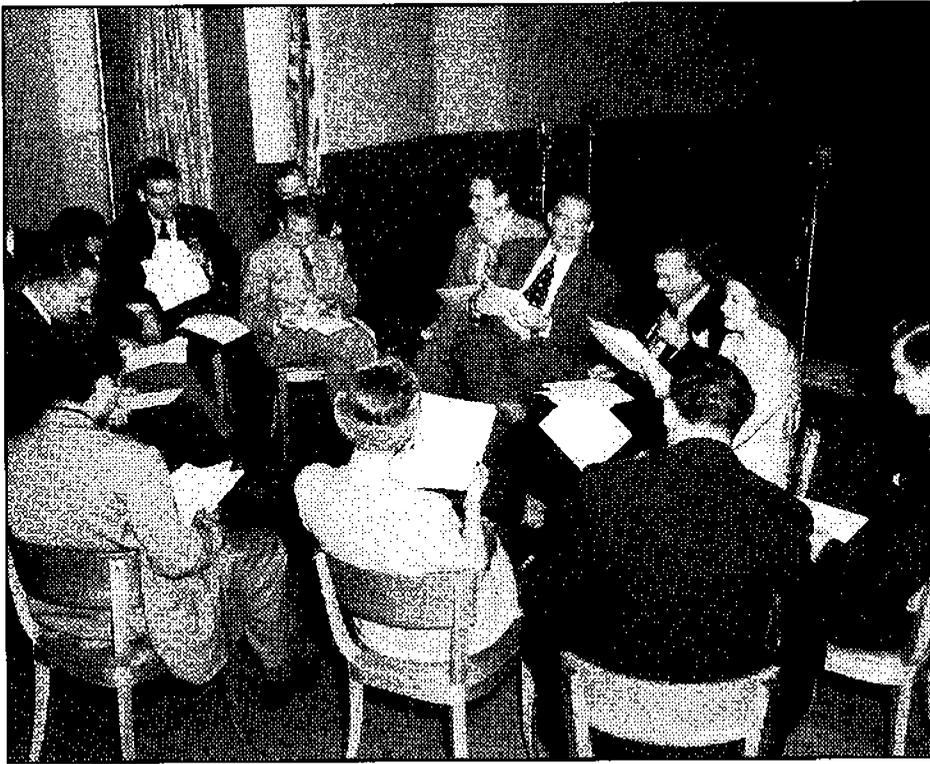
mal Crackers" there as well.)

When not filming, the duo guest starred on a variety of shows (after working the Palace with Eddie Cantor, Gracie alone was asked on his show, and later star maker Rudy Vallee opted for both members of the team when they appeared on his Fleischman's Hour in 1932), until they were invited to add comedy to Guy Lombardo's Robert Burns Panatella Hour. When the famed Royal Canadian took his band to another network in 1932, Burns and Allen debuted on CBS as radio stars for the first time.

Throughout the 1930's George Burns and Gracie Allen found time to make twelve feature films for Paramount and one each at RKO and MGM. The talent starring with the team at the mountain top company reads like a Who's Who of the era's best: Bing Crosby, W.C. Fields, Charlie Ruggles, Alison Skipworth, Carole Lombard, Ray Milland, Jack Oakie, Ethel Merman, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and so on. The co-stars at the other two studios were similarly not very shabby: Joan Fontaine, Ray Noble, Elcanor Powell, Robert Young, and Eddie "Rochester" Anderson.

George and Gracie found no greater audience than they did with their weekly radio program that ran for eighteen years. They moved from network to network with a variety of sponsors until they found their greatest permanence on NBC for Maxwell House in 1945. Among their other sponsors were White Owl Cigars, Campbell's Soups, Grape Nuts, Chesterfield cigarettes, Hinds Cream, Hormel Meats, and Swan Soap. One final sponsor during the last radio season that would carry them into television was Carnation Milk, one of many products that had to be explained to Gracie. "How do you milk a carnation?" she would ask.

Over the years the show saw two major



CAST AND PRODUCTION STAFF of George and Gracie's 1941 radio season run over script for the first broadcast on October 7. Pictured with their backs to the camera, left to right, are Senor Irving Lee, Edith Evanson, and Bill Goodwin. Jimmy Cash is at Goodwin's right. Left to right in semi-circle facing camera are: Glenhall Taylor, agency producer; his assistant, Al Scalpone (partially in view); Dave Elton, NBC producer; Sam Perrin, head of the writing staff; Harvey Helm, writer; George Balzer, writer (with hand on face); Paul Whiteman, George and Gracie.

changes: at first it resembled vaudeville over the air, but later it became the domestic troubles of George and Gracie, usually instigated by her misunderstanding of a seemingly simple situation or because she just had to have a certain dress or car or visit with an important person. George explained that changes needed to be made when the show's ratings began slipping slightly in 1942.

Gracie had been playing a daffy, unmarried younger woman for years, and it was time to make official what the audience already knew, George and Gracie were married, so situations revolving around their domestic life became the fodder for

the writers. Two ongoing successful gags that Gracie pursued while on radio were her search for her lost brother on other radio shows of the 1930's and her bid for president in 1940, when she ran on the "Surprise Party" ticket.

Audiences were so amenable to her character, that they accepted her crazy endeavors as real, following schemes that originated on the Burns and Allen Show and poured over into other programs.

Music provided interludes in the program's silliness, and even Gracie soloed in early shows. Among the renowned orchestra leaders working with the show were Ferde Grofé, Bobby Dolan, Eddie Duchin,

GEORGE BURNS CENTENNIAL

Ray Noble, Artie Shaw, Henry King, Paul Whiteman, Meredith Willson, and Harry Lubin. In the early years, like on the Jack Benny or Fred Allen shows, resident male singers like singing cowboy Dick Foran, tenors Jimmy Cash or Frank Parker, Tony Martin, or the Buccaneers male octet provided the serious musical number of the evening, but in the 1940's the orchestra took over this job, resulting in musical commercials that were as entertaining as the story line. It was also during this time that a skirt chasing announcer was added to the cast.

Bill Goodwin had been in radio for a number of years when George asked him to be a part of the cast. This meant that there were actually two announcers, Toby Reed assumed the "serious" announcing, while Goodwin joined in on the story line helping Gracie weave her scheme of the night, as he integrated information on Swan Soap or Maxwell House Coffee. His skirt-chasing activities made him the longest running other regular character on the show, following Burns and Allen into television until 1951.

There were other supporting characters who came and went as the Burns and Allen show progressed. A character who provided voices on many radio shows was Mel Blanc, who gave Mrs. Burns the saddest mailman to walk a beat ("And remember, Mrs. Burns, keep smiling.") Elvia Allman was Gracie's girlfriend Tootsie Bagwell; Bea Benadaret assumed the part of neighbor Blanche Morton; and a variety of curmudgeons were frequently played by Hans Conreid or Gale Gordon.

By 1950, many of radio's best were trying out television, and the Burns and Allen Show was no exception. During the first season, the program, which started on October 12, 1950, was telecast live from New

York every other Thursday, alternating with The Garry Moore Show. Starting in 1952 the long running comedy was filmed from the West Coast and took on a new look. It soon began to lose the air of a "live" production as it had from its first season on radio, but the role of the omniscient George observing and manipulating Gracie as he spoke directly to the audience was developed into one of the most interesting characters of early television comedy. The peak year for ratings was 1953-54, when it was number twenty.

Gracie retired in 1958 and The George Burns Show debuted on October 21st of that year and lasted until April 14, 1959. During this altered season, all of the regular cast members remained, and there were references to Gracie, but there was not enough interest for the audience to just follow George, who played a theatrical producer working with aspiring startlets.

During its run on television in the 1950's, The Burns and Allen Show saw a number of cast changes. In the role of bedeviled next door neighbor husband there were four Harry Mortons: Hal March (1950-51), John Brown (1951), Fred Clark (1951-53), and Larry Keating (1953-58). Blanche Morton was played on radio and television by character actress Bea Benadaret. The two veteran radio announcers who hawked the sponsors' wares and commiserated with George were played by Bill Goodwin (1950-51) and Harry Von Zell (1951-58). The doleful mailman Mr. Beasley was played on television by Rolfe Sedan, and in 1955 Ronnie Burns joined the cast to play himself.

The final regular television series for George Burns started on September 14, 1964 and ran until September 6, 1969. Wendy and Me was an attempt to pair George with a daffy Gracie counterpart. In the comedy he runs a boarding house where Connie Stevens and husband reside.



"I love her, that's why!"

The pairing seemed logical, given George's success with a female partner with dizzy logic, and he had worked with Connie in Las Vegas just before the season was to start.

Gracie Allen suffered a fatal heart attack just a month before George's new show was to begin.

Like the trouper he is, George continued, but everyone knew, that as great comedy teams go, it is virtually impossible to dispel the audience's expectations for the substitute. Gracie was such a dominant character in entertainment for three decades that the new partner had impossible shoes to fill.

For George Burns the next step was not retirement from comedy- after all he was only in his early seventies- but rather a new approach to his love of entertaining.

After guesting on many shows and play-

ing stages like those in Las Vegas, another personal misfortune turned into a break for George Burns. Neil Simon's play "The Sunshine Boys" was being made into a motion picture, and Burns' great friend Jack Benny was slated to play the part of one of the aging vaudevillians. Before any shooting on the film took place, Benny died.

It was a second deeply personal loss to George Burns. When it was suggested that he take Benny's part in the film, the idea of doing justice to his long-time friend and vaudeville were enough of a draw. Not only did he succeed with partner Walter Matthau as two characters who were based on the successful comedy team of Smith and Dale, but he also carried home the 1975 Oscar as Best Supporting Actor, not a bad trick for one who had not been in a movie since 1939.

The motion picture roles, stage dates, and television appearances continued for George Burns. Among the other laudable films he made were "Oh, God" and "Going in Style."

He had planned some personal appearances in Las Vegas for his 100th birthday, but those plans were cancelled last September after he suffered a fall earlier in the year.

No other entertainer can make the claim that he has performed in every decade of the twentieth century.

Not only can George Burns say that, but he can also lay claim to being successful in making people smile from the early days of the Wright Brothers through those who enjoy digitized George and Gracie in the CD age.

In his own words: "Gracie and I loved it all. Whatever we were doing at the time we loved best at the time we were doing it. In short, we just loved show business."

Say "Happy Birthday," Gracie, on behalf of all of us. ■

*Ken Alexander
Remembers . . .*

The Christmas Program



We all have Christmas memories which we've cherished since our childhood, and I've told you some of mine. In these pages, in past years, I've written of my dad testing the Christmas tree lights on a Saturday morning a week before Christmas to save Santa the trouble on Christmas Eve; a walnut or a piece of hard candy left on a windowsill by one of Santa's brownies a few days before Christmas when I had been well behaved; the time I actually saw one of the brownies.

I've told you of the trip downtown with my parents to see the department store window displays and to tell Santa what was on my mind; the thrill of seeing the tree ablaze with lights on Christmas morning; the pair of high-top boots I received as a gift one year.

Another of my Christmas memories concerns a tradition at George W. Tilton School on the West Side, where I was a pupil in the late 1930s and early '40s. The tradition was an annual program put on by the eighth-graders in the assembly hall the week before Christmas.

The program consisted of a series of tableaux depicting various aspects of the Nativity, each tableau being accompanied by an appropriate Christmas carol. The stage was hidden by the curtain, which was closed except for a six-foot-wide open

space in the center, which was filled by a white sheet hanging like a movie screen.

At the rear of the stage was a slide projector aimed toward this white screen.

On stage, just behind the screen, the pupils would create a tableau. The slide projector, with no slide in place, would shine its large square of light on the tableau, which would cast a sharp, clear shadow on the white screen.

Because the sheet being used for a screen was translucent, the shadows appeared on both the front and rear of the screen, so that the audience out front saw a kind of Christmas card, six feet wide and six feet high.

While three or four pupils were appearing in the tableau, the rest of the eighth-grade class, hidden behind the curtain, would be singing a carol.

For "Silent Night," the tableau would show the Virgin Mary seated behind a cradle, Joseph standing at her side, and a pair of shepherds kneeling before them. Behind the shepherds a lamb lay on the ground.

As the class sang "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," the audience would see a trio of angels, their faces raised as if in song.

"The First Noel" would be accompanied by a scene showing the Three Wise Men, crowns on their heads and gifts in their

hands, walking in single file. A star hung above and ahead of them.

For "O Little Town of Bethlehem," no human figures were used; this tableau consisted of a group of buildings — a house, a stable, a shack, and a low building with a domed roof. A palm tree stood at one side.

A colored slide would be placed in the projector for some of the tableaux, causing the background to be colored rather than white.

For "Silent Night" a deep blue was used to depict the calm night sky. In another case, a slide of rosy red on the top half and a dark green on the bottom suggested a sunrise.

The children in the tableaux had to be as motionless as statues. When each carol ended, the slide projector would be turned off, the set would be struck, and the darkened stage behind the curtain would become a bustling place while the pupils, directed by their teacher, created the next tableau.

These shows cost very little to produce, because everything was seen only in silhouette. The town of Bethlehem may have been constructed of panels from a Campbell's soup case. The shepherds' staffs were mop handles with a piece of cardboard in the shape of an inverted "J" forming the crook at the end.

The Wise Men's crowns were made of cardboard. The boys portraying the Wise Men and Joseph and the shepherds had lengths of three-inch-wide paper tape stuck across their chins; in profile, they appeared to be wearing beards.

As one of the Magi, I wore my father's bathrobe.

The lambs were made of cardboard and the palm tree was a cardboard tree. The Star of Bethlehem was a cardboard star.

But it mattered not at all what materials the props were made of, or what colors they were; only their black shadows could be

seen out front. As far as the audience was concerned, the Bethlehem structures were made of stone and lumber, and the Wise Men's crowns might have been solid gold.

There was nothing spectacular about these Christmas programs. The scenes were absolutely motionless. The carols were rendered simply and quietly, sung in four-part harmony, *a cappella* — no trumpets, no cymbals, no drums, just the sweet voices of children.

But unpretentious as they were, I found these Christmas programs to be deeply moving.

Every month or so at Tilton, we pupils were herded into the assembly hall for a program of some kind. These programs soon faded from my memory — all except the Christmas program.

I haven't forgotten the Christmas program, and I hope I never will. ■

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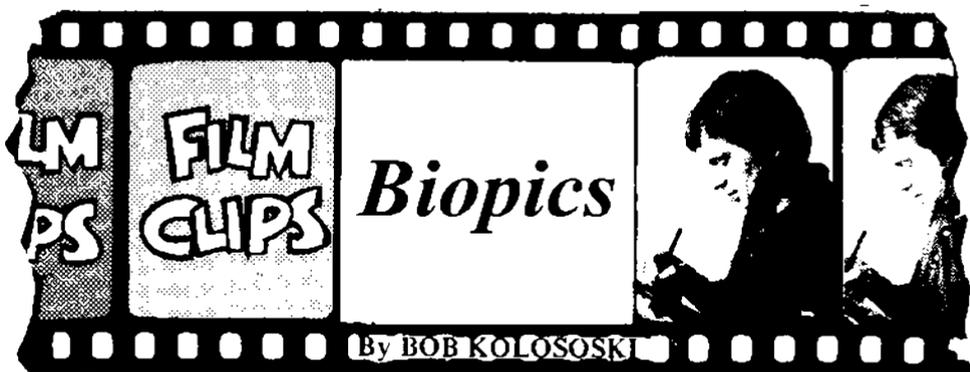
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The recipe for a good film has always consisted of several key ingredients to guarantee a successful creation.

The essential ingredient has to be a good, solid story with a healthy dose of interesting characters. Add a dash of good performances and steady direction and the whole mixture begins to take shape. Bake in an adequate budget, sprinkle with good production values and, to insure the entire process, time everything perfectly in the editing room.

The movie producer who follows this tried and true recipe will be rewarded (most of the time) with a box office hit and an audience eagerly awaiting his next confection.

Since the beginning of film, producers and directors have known about this recipe for success, but have managed consistently to miss the mark.

Some of the best examples of boring, bad films are screen biographies.

Logic would dictate that the decision to spend huge amounts of money on the story of someone's life would be preceded by the conclusion that the life was worth the effort. Of course logic and filming are normally diametrically opposed and dozens of other factors, such as ego, supersede the decision making process. Of the dozens of biopics (biographical pictures) produced, only about half were successful at the box office, and only a select few of

those have become "classics."

Any study of film biographies will produce one fascinating fact: the variety of subject matter is amazing, and the choice of actors to portray the film's subject is as important as the subject.

The choice of Clark Gable to be the lead in "Parnell" (1937) produced his biggest flop, while Gary Cooper was perfect for World War I hero Alvin York in "Sergeant York" (1941). Studios have lost millions miscasting biographies (Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra was a loser for 20th Century Fox) and have reaped huge profits with the right casting (Barbra Streisand as Fanny Brice in "Funny Girl").

The subject has to be interesting or made interesting by the screenwriters in order to have a solid story. The 1944 biopic of Woodrow Wilson was a lavish Technicolor production that couldn't disguise the deadly dullness of the subject. The life of George M. Cohan had zip with a capital Z, and the black and white 1943 production "Yankee Doodle Dandy" starring James Cagney is still fun to watch.

The first biopics weren't produced to be frothy entertainment, but rather historical dramas based on the lives of famous people. And the famous people first immortalized on the screen were British.

George Arliss was a British stage actor who came to America prior to World War I. He became a favorite Broadway actor



YANKEE DOODLE DANDY (1943) was one of the great movie biographies. The lavish musical starred, from left, Jeanne Cagney, James Cagney, Rosemary DeCamp, and Walter Huston.

and, in 1921, filmed his stage play "Disraeli" based on the life of the British prime minister. When Arliss made his talking picture debut in 1930 the film was "Disraeli." Later in the decade he would appear in biopics of "Alexander Hamilton" (1931), "Voltaire" (1933), and as Nathan Rothschild in "The House of Rothschild" (1934). All his films were well received by the public, but his acting style was rooted to the stage and often his performances were wooden.

Meanwhile, back in England, producer Alexander Korda was creating "The Private Life of Henry VIII" (1933) starring Charles Laughton. Because of his broad performance, Laughton became the first British actor to win the best acting Oscar in a British film. Korda was besieged with offers from America, but remained in En-

gland to produce a series of first class films.

He returned to film biographies several times with mixed results. He persuaded Douglas Fairbanks to star in "The Private Life of Don Juan" (1934) and fell short of a great film mainly because his cast (starting at the top) was not up to the material. Korda had great hopes for "Catherine the Great" (1935), but the entire production suffered from a case of tired blood. It took Charles Laughton, again, to end Korda's losing streak with the excellent "Rembrandt" (1936). Laughton's performance was another winner, but only returned a small profit forcing Korda to abandon any future film biographies.

As Korda was dropping the biography ball, British producer-director Herbert Wilcox was picking it up with his production of "Victoria the Great" (1937), star-

FILM CLIPS

ring Anna Neagle who was so good as the British queen that Wilcox married her and proceeded to make several films with his bride as the star, including "Nurse Edith Cavell" (1939), which was made at RKO studios. The story of the World War I humanitarian executed by the German government was well made with a fine cast including Edna Mae Oliver and George Sanders. In 1940 Wilcox wrote, produced and directed a Queen Victoria sequel with Anna Neagle playing the monarch in "Queen of Destiny." The public had enough of the dead queen's life and took a pass on the film. Shaken by the failure of his royal efforts to click with audiences, Wilcox turned to current affairs and produced and directed Neagle in "Wings and the Woman" (1942), the story of British aviatrix Amy Johnson Mollison. It was timely and did well at the box office.

Warner Bros. had resisted doing biographies after the departure of George Arliss from the studio. One exception was a film loosely based on the life of silver magnate

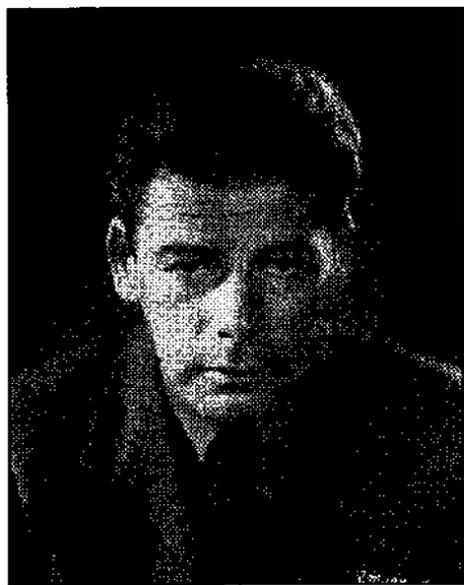
H. A. W. Tabor starring Edward G. Robinson as a dry goods merchant who builds and loses a fortune based on the worth of silver. "Silver Dollar" (1933) was a no-nonsense story, well-acted by all and, in particular, the performance of Robinson. But even the success of that film couldn't convince Jack Warner that biopics were what the public would spend money to see.

In 1936 director William Dieterle and actor Paul Muni were given a meager budget and tight schedule to shoot "The Story of Louis Pasteur." It was a winner all the way. The next year Muni and Dieterle were teamed again in the powerful "Life of Emile Zola." Muni was a first class character actor who happened to be given the chance to portray some first class characters and responded with performances that have rarely been marched. His final biopic at Warners was "Juarez" (1939). The film was only a marginal success and Jack Warner had Edward G. Robinson demanding better roles, so Muni was out and Robinson was in. He was given the lead in "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" (1940). His intense performance as Dr. Paul Ehrlich, the man who discovered the cure for syphilis, was flawless and the entire production a triumph for the studio.

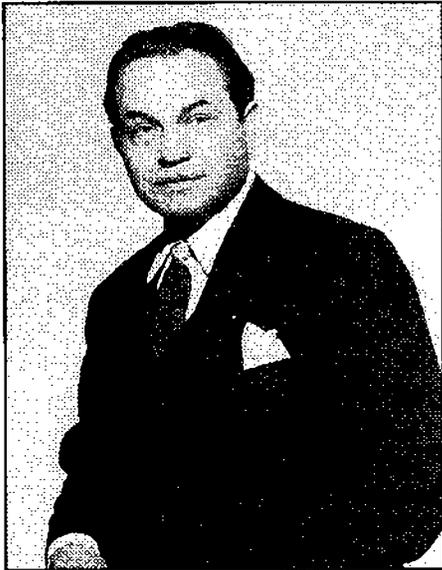
Film biographies were now considered prestige projects at all the studios.

Although MGM produced very few film biographies, the studio took a novel approach to filming the life of Thomas Edison. They produced two movies in 1940 dedicated to paying tribute to the great American inventor. The first was "Young Tom Edison" with a young Mickey Rooney as the teenaged genius. The second was "Edison the Man" with Spencer Tracy solemnly portraying the inventor during his mid-life years. Both films were typically polished MGM productions, but were short on historical facts.

That same year Abraham Lincoln was



PAUL MUNI



EDWARD G. ROBINSON

lionized by two different studios. 20th Century Fox assigned John Ford to film "Young Mr. Lincoln" with Henry Fonda as the future president. Over at RKO, the Robert Sherwood play "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" was filmed with Raymond Masscy as Lincoln. Both films were great tributes to the man, but drama replaced historical facts.

Paramount and Universal tended to stay away from biographies as did most of the smaller studios. That policy held at Columbia until 1946. Harry Cohn decided to film the life story of "the world's greatest entertainer" Al Jolson who had made a mild comeback during WW II by traveling thousands of miles entertaining Allied troops. Everywhere he went his shows were well-received by throngs of troops. Cohn wisely surmised that the thousands of men who saw Jolson perform for free would pay to see his biography. Larry Parks, a young unknown, was cast as Jolson, with Jolson himself singing the songs as Parks mouthed the words on the screen. The movie was a huge hit, even though it was highly fiction-



LARRY PARKS

alized, and Jolson became an "overnight success" again.

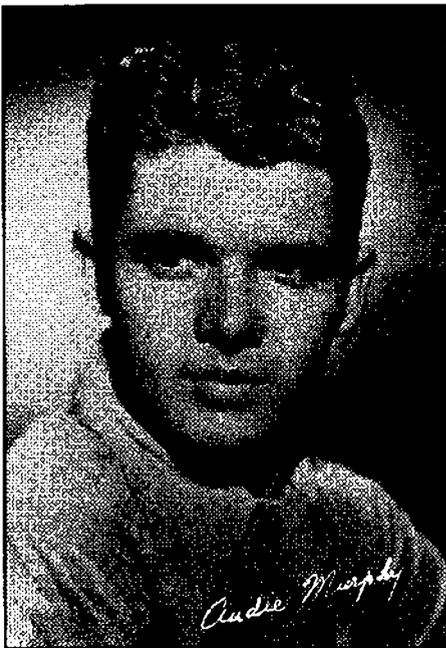
Other studios jumped on the biopic bandwagon and entertainers' lives were filmed at every studio. Paramount produced "The Perils of Pauline" (1947) with Betty Hutton as silent screen heroine Pearl White. Warners took a chance that the public would buy tickets to hear as well as see the life of George Gershwin in "Rhapsody in Blue" (1946). Since MGM did everything a little better, the studio produced the biographical story of Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers in one film, "Words and Music" (1947). Screen biographies of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Buster Keaton, Beethoven, Caruso and many others would follow.

Biographies of professional athletes vary from the pitiful "Babe Ruth Story" (1949) to the fascinating "Raging Bull" (1980). There have been films about professional golfers ("Follow the Sun" 1951), football players ("Jim Thorpe, All-American" 1950), and swimmers ("Neptune's Daughter" 1949). Someone even saw fit to bring

FILM CLIPS

the biography of a horse to the screen with "The Great Dan Patch" (1948). Although athletes are often called heroes, it seems that men who served in the armed forces deserve that title over men and women playing games. It also seems fitting that the first biopic of a WW II hero was that of a foot soldier and not one of the generals. "To Hell and Back" (1955) was the story of the war's most decorated hero Audie Murphy. Later, George C. Scott powerfully played "Patton" (1970).

Biographies can be entertaining, informative history lessons and should be good stories. They are a rich part of the movies, but very few are produced today because TV has taken over that segment of the cinema. Human history is overloaded with people who would make fascinating subjects for biopics. As movie viewers we should seek out and enjoy the good biographies already filmed and anticipate those to come. ■



AUDIE MURPHY

OLD TIME RADIO IN CYBERSPACE

BY RICHARD KUNZ

Imagine a marriage between Atwater Kent and Hewlett Packard. Or envision yourself tooling along the Information Superhighway in a 1937 Dodge. Mixed metaphors aside, that's Old Time Radio in Cyberspace.

Readers of the *Nostalgia Digest* are quite familiar with Old Time Radio; simply put, "cyberspace" is that land in which computers reside and communicate. The "Information Superhighway" is often thought of (albeit somewhat incorrectly) as the Internet—that vast communications network connecting the smallest PCs with giant mainframe computers.

Today's Internet has literally thousands of nooks and crannies devoted to virtually every human interest—good and bad, as you may have read—and Old Time Radio has most certainly not been neglected. For the price of a modem (as little as \$50) and less than a dollar a day in phone and connect charges, the 2/3 of U.S. homes that are computer-equipped these days can dial up a treasure trove of information on the Golden Age of Radio.

We'll begin with the free "flagship" electronic publication about the hobby, known simply as the "OTR Digest". It's "published" almost daily on the Internet by Lou Genco, and averages about 8 or so pages of interactive information and comment that is the characteristic of most similar electronic works. It's really a forum digest where reader comments, questions, answers, trivia, etc. are most welcome; Lou acts essentially as a moderator to keep the discussions from straying off on arcane tangents or otherwise bogging down.

A typical issue will be devoted to a dozen or more "postings" (Internet lingo for letters or notes) on a variety of subjects relevant to OTR. Issue #202 of Volume 95 (dated 26 July 1995), for example, headlines these articles/topics: "Was recorded music illegal?", "Death Valley Days", " 'I Can Hear It Now' recordings", "Ban on Recordings Update", "Harry Morgan", "Recorded Music and Robots", "1940 DJ Liberation Day", "Old Time Radio Clubs", "Singin' Sam", . . . the list goes on.

The individual articles will ask a question (or provide answers to an earlier query), offer opinions (the "thread" [series of postings on a single subject] on reel-to-reel vs. cassette has drawn much ink [electronics?] over the past months; copyright philosophies are also a big item), suggest vendors of OTR material (there are quite a few, BTW ['Netese for "by the way"']), and notices of upcoming OTR conventions. There are also references to various OTR programs in different areas of the country; Chuck Schaden's own *TWTD* rates frequent mention.

Contributors come, to use the old cliché, literally from all walks of life, mirroring the Internet itself. Lawyers, doctors, writers, retirees, high-school and college students, OTR fan club presidents, housewives—probably even an Indian chief or two make up the readership, posters and "lurkers" (those who read the Digest, but have not yet contributed to it). It's quite a merry band, all with a genuine interest in the hobby—and the discussions often get quite spirited (Who are your favorite OTR personalities? Was Jack Benny funnier than Fred Allen? Should the commercials be deleted from OTR tapes?).

But there's more. The OTR Digest is a project of Airwaves Media, run by an unassuming Midwesterner named William Pfeiffer. He is moderator of several allied electronic publications on contemporary

radio ("Airwaves" itself is an excellent chronicle of the radio industry today), and maintains an archive of material of both modern and historical interest. That archive may be accessed through the Internet (details below), and contains a number of gems for the OTR aficionado.

The OTR files contain historical items such as call-letter, network and radio station histories, some photos of OTR personalities, audio clips of theme songs and other short bits, a complete set of the "OTR Digest", a list of "Frequently-Asked-Questions" (FAQ) about OTR, a link to the University of Memphis tape catalog, another to the Bellingham (WA) Antique Radio Museum, a section on "The Shadow" program, and even a link to a source for information on vintage television programming and personalities. There's a "Trading Post" advertising section and shareware (OTR-related computer programs) downloading points as well.

Needless to say, the pursuit of OTR by Internet can be a rewarding experience. So, boot up the old PC or Mac, turn on the modem and enjoy!

[Note: To access the Internet, you will need a "service provider" (ISP). This can be a commercial on-line service like CompuServe, America On-Line, Prodigy or Delphi, or one of the many independent firms that have entered the field in recent months. Check with your computer dealer for the best way for you to go on line.]

To subscribe to the OTR Digest via e-mail, send a message to "old.time.radio-request@airwaves.com". The subject line must read: "subscribe"; the body of the message should be left blank. Only characters inside the quotes should be entered exactly as shown with punctuation, and the quotes themselves ignored.

To access the OTR archives via World Wide Web, use the URL:

"<http://radio.aiss.uiuc.edu/~rrh/>" ■

Ghosts of Christmas Past

BY JIM BENES

If Charles Dickens' Ghost of Christmas Past visited Chicago, he would have a lot of stories to tell.

Like about the time the city got its first municipal Christmas tree. That was in 1913. The tree was 35 feet tall, and it was a gift from the former partner of the captain of "the Christmas tree ship," which annually arrived in Chicago bearing a load of firs from northern Michigan. The ship, the *Rouse Simmons*, had sunk the year before. The former partner, tree dealer F. J. Jordan, said "This is the best gift I could give the city. I have watched this old tree grow for many years. Every winter when the men went among the evergreens with their axes, the old grand dad tree was spared. Many times I was tempted to bring it to some rich family. But it didn't seem quite right to the poor girl and the poor boy, who had no tree at all. Now it belongs to the city."

The tree was "planted" in Grant Park, and on Christmas Eve the city celebrated with a "Christmas Fest" of sorts. One hundred thousand people jammed along Michigan Avenue from Monroe Street to Washington. In the fog and the gloom of late afternoon they listened to a program that began with the Chicago band performing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Near the Art Institute a series of "safety first" films for children were being shown on a giant screen.

Jim Benes is morning news editor for WBBM, Newsradio 78, Chicago. Each year, during the week before Christmas, he hosts a series he writes and produces called Christmas Past.

Just before six o'clock, Mayor Carter Harrison mounted the platform that stood in front of the great tree. He concluded his short speech by saying "Let us hope the lights on this tree will so shine out as to be an inspiration to Christian charity and to inject new courage and hope into the hearts of those not so fortunate as we are."

Then he pushed a button and hundreds of multicolored lights blazed brightly from the limbs of the tree, their colors reflecting and playing off clouds of steam from half a dozen Illinois Central locomotives which were behind the tree. The *Chicago Tribune* said it created a "kaleidoscopic effect."

The program ended with members of the Chicago Grand Opera Company performing; trumpets and soloist from the third floor balcony of the Chicago Athletic Association, the chorus from the north portico of the Art Institute.

The words "Peace on earth, good will toward men" meant a lot more to Chicagoans when the Christmas of 1945 rolled around. World War II had ended a little more than three months before, and hundreds of thousands of America's sons and daughters were coming home, about 50,000 arriving each day at ports on the east and west coasts. Most travelled to their homes by train and in 1945 Chicago was the rail hub of the nation.

What this meant was that the city's rail terminals, bus stations and airport were jammed beyond capacity. The crowds at the terminals were shoulder-to-shoulder. So many people wanted train tickets that at some points the box offices had to shut



CHRISTMAS, 1951 WAS THE SNOWIEST IN CHICAGO'S HISTORY

down. Trains were running late, schedules were in shambles. The railroads tried to cope by making up special trains as rolling stock became available. One city official said it was "far beyond even my worst transportation nightmares."

Finally, Governor Dwight Green called out 500 reservists and more than 100 jeeps and trucks. They helped ferry servicemen between terminals or sometimes took them directly home.

The chaos finally eased.

One of the passengers who made up the crowd was Colonel James Stewart. He was en route to Indiana, Pennsylvania, to spend Christmas with his mother. In Chicago, he told reporters that after he received his Air Force discharge in February, 1946, he planned to start work on a new picture that would be called "It's A Wonderful Life."

Another transportation nightmare occurred on the Christmas six years later: **1951's** Yule would prove to be the snowiest in Chicago's history.

The snow started to fall on Friday, December 14. One week later, by Friday, December 21 it was 22 inches deep in the Loop. Thousands of stalled and abandoned cars littered the streets. Mayor Martin Kennelly declared a "dangerous emergency," and ordered police to ticket and tow cars that were in the way of buses and trolleys on arterial and through streets.

The city had 274 plows out trying to clear the snow, but it was a losing battle. On Saturday, December 22, the temperature dipped to minus 4. Strong winds whipped the snow into mammoth drifts.

Then on Monday, Christmas Eve, it started to snow again. Buses and street-

GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

cars ran five hours behind schedule. Midway Airport was entirely shut down for four hours. All Chicago Police cars were ordered "into reserve," but many had burned clutches or were not equipped with tire chains and were not serviceable.

When the snow finally stopped falling on Christmas Day, another eight and one half inches had come down, making a total accumulation of more than 33 inches since December 14. Many families were unable to get to Grandma's house for the traditional holiday meal that Christmas. It was days before any transportation again moved at anything approaching the normal rate.

If 1951 was Chicago's snowiest Christmas, 1983 was the city's coldest. At 7 a.m. on Saturday, Christmas Eve, the mercury dipped to minus 25. The wind chill made it feel like minus 80.

It was so cold that road salt was no longer effective on slick highways. The Chicago Motor Club was reporting 200 calls per hour from drivers, many of whom had discovered that their car's engine had frozen.

The cold made it particularly miserable for 140 families living in the Cabrini-Green CHA complex. They had no heat because of a broken water pipe. It took workmen 14 hours to restore service. The CHA handed out electric space heaters, but many families found that their electricity also was out.

The Cook County Medical Examiner's office counted ten people dead from hypothermia over that holiday.

If the Ghost of Christmas Past were to go way back in time, he would come up with some amusing stories.

In 1882, the city lived up to the reputation Carl Sandburg would later give it as "Hog Butcher of the World." Meatpacker Armour & Company put out an elaborate

display of its products, and the *Chicago Tribune* raved about it, especially the life-like sculptures of pigs, made out of lard:

Considered artistically these pigs deserve to rank with the famous "butter women" who made such a reputation at the Philadelphia Centennial. Christmas fashions in cuts, joints and the ribs of beef, pork and mutton attracted the admiring attention of thousands. The ladies went into rhapsodies over the neckties which adorned the juvenile mutton, and studied with positive pleasure the effect of rosets on a background of beef. ... There were leaning towers of lard, symphonies of sausage, mountains of smoked meats and pyramids of canned goods...

Kindergarten teacher Anna Nichols had a good idea that went radically wrong at Christmastime, 1901. She dressed up as Santa Claus for her students at the Perkins Bass elementary school on west 67th street. She even put on a set of false whiskers. Now in those days, Christmas trees were illuminated by burning candles, and that's where her idea went wrong. While leaning over the tree, her flowing whiskers caught fire. The *Chicago InterOcean* newspaper tells us there was a series of feminine shrieks mixed with the odor of burning hair as Santa tugged wildly at her disguise. Forty little children, eyes wide, watched Santa with bated breath.

Finally, Santa struggled out of her costume, and the children saw that it wasn't Santa at all, no, but rather Miss Nichols. The *InterOcean* says the children were disillusionized."

Nearly 200 Christmases have come and gone since Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable became the first permanent resident of what would someday become the City of Chicago. Something interesting, or poignant, or tragic, or memorable, or funny has happened at nearly each one.

That's a lot of Christmas memories. ■



Museum of Broadcast Communications

museum pieces

Reported by Margaret Warren

A STANDING OVATION by a sellout crowd greeted Audrey Meadows as she took to the stage of the Chicago Cultural Center Theatre on a Sunday afternoon last October. She was visiting the Museum to mark the 40th Anniversary of "The Honeymooners" on which she starred with the late Jackie Gleason. Media critic Gary Deeb joined her on stage to chat about her long and successful career with special attention to her years as "Alice Kramden."

Audrey told us that Art Carney, whom she described as the "shyest, most humble man," drove her home after every broadcast. And we'd always heard that Gleason hated to rehearse. She said to compensate for that, "the cameramen just followed whoever was doing the talking. Usually that was Jackie!"

She spoke fondly of her association with Gleason and the entire cast. These days her favorite TV shows are "Mad About You" and "Seinfeld." She's skeptical of a "Honeymooners" remake, but thinks that Bonnie Hunt might be good in the "Alice" role. As for "Ralph," her choices had been the two late actors John Belushi and

John Candy.

It was a memorable afternoon full of wonderful tales of people, places and situations. If you missed out, stop by the Museum Archives and watch the tape. It's a gem! Audrey Meadows was gracious and funny; a joy to meet and work with.



AUDREY MEADOWS checks out Fibber McGee's closet during her Museum visit in October.

Museum of Broadcast Communications

Chicago Cultural Center

Michigan Avenue at Washington Street

Chicago, 60602

Phone (312) 629-6000.



THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

DECEMBER 1995

PLEASE NOTE: The numerals following each program listing for *Those Were The Days* represents the length of time for each particular show; (28:50) means the program will run 28 minutes and 50 seconds. This may be of help to those who tape the programs for their own collection.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2nd RADIO TO PLAN YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST BY

TWENTY-FIRST PRECINCT (1950s) Everett Sloane stars as the police captain in charge. While a woman files a complaint, the station house prepares for the Christmas party to be held for neighborhood children. Cast features Ken Lynch, Harold Stone. Sustaining, CBS. (28:05)

POP CHRONICLES — THE 40s (1972) Program seven in the eight-part series hosted and produced by John Gilliland. Rare interviews, commentary and music from the end of the decade. KSFO, San Francisco. (45:00)

ROBERT TROUT AND THE NEWS (12-12-48) No doubt about it, the Electoral College will elect Harry Truman. Pillsbury, NBC. (4:30)

LIVING, 1948 (12-12-48) "The Greatest Christmas Present" is the story of an immigrant family which comes to America for the

birth of their child. Ben Grauer narrates. Sustaining, NBC. (24:45)

SONGS BY SINATRA (12-5-45) In New York City for an extended personal appearance engagement, Frank is joined by June Hutton, the Pied Pipers, Axel Stordahl and the orchestra for an early musical look at the holiday season. Frank sings "Let It Snow," "Jingle Bells" and a medley of Christmas carols in anticipation of the first peacetime Christmas after the end of World War II. Old Gold Cigarettes, CBS. (26:40) **NOTE**— *Frank Sinatra's 80th birthday is December 12, 1995.*

PHIL HARRIS—ALICE FAYE SHOW (12-19-52) Phil has to play Santa Claus at the Women's Club Christmas party. Cast includes Elliott Lewis, Robert North, Jeanine Roos and Anne Whitfield. Alice sings "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" and Phil offers "Jingle Bells." Rexall, NBC. (23:50)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9th RADIO TO ADDRESS CHRISTMAS CARDS BY

TALENT SCOUTS (12-19-49) Arthur Godfrey presents a program of youthful, nonprofessional talent for his Christmas show. The "talent scouts" are youngsters, too. Featured are announcer George Bryan, Peggy Marshall and the Holidays, Archie Blyer and the orchestra. This program was simulcast on both radio and television. Lipton Tea, CBS. (29:10)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-10-47) Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve who decides to do his Christmas shopping "early" this year. Walter Tetley as Leroy, Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Louise Erickson as Marjorie, Earl Ross as Judge Hooker, Dick LeGrand as Peavy. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30:53) **NOTE**— *This is the first of four consecutive Gildersleeve programs to be presented this month.*

POP CHRONICLES — THE 40s (1972) The eighth and final program in this series telling the story of pop music in the 1940s. John Gilliland is host. KSFO, San Francisco. (45:00)

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BEULAH (12-24-53) Amanda Randolph stars as Beulah, with Ernie Whitman, Ruby Dandridge, Hugh Studebaker and Mary Jane Croft. Beulah's boss has been selected honorary Santa Claus, thanks to her. Sustaining, CBS. (14:30)

MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER (12-25-51) "Christmas Story" stars Leon Janney and Ann Shepherd with Lawson Zerbe. A man driving across the country with a stranger decides to impersonate him when he dies suddenly. The opportunity to collect a dishonest inheritance seems irresistible. Sustaining, MBS. (29:15)

FATHER KNOWS BEST (12-25-52) Robert Young stars in the radio version of the series before it moved to television. On Christmas night, as the Anderson family basks in the glow of the holiday, the children are still working on father's gift. Sustaining, NBC. (24:00)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16th RADIO TO WRAP, BAKE AND DECORATE BY

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-17-47) Gildy, angry with the Mayor's response in the newspaper about laxity in the Water Department, locks himself in his room until he gets an apology. *This is an unusual broadcast, with Hal Peary absent from the program due to illness.* Walter Tetley, Lillian Randolph, Louise Erickson. Kraft Foods, NBC. (31:10)



LIONEL BARRYMORE

CHRISTMAS COMMAND PERFORMANCE (12-24-45) It's the Armed Forces Radio Service's fourth annual holiday broadcast. Bob Hope leads an all-star cast celebrating the first peacetime Christmas since the series began: Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Harry James and the orchestra, Herbert Marshall, Jimmy Durante, Ginny Simms, Jerry Colonna, Johnny Mercer, Judy Garland, Pied Pipers, Ed "Archie" Gardner, Frances Langford, Kay Kyser, Cass Daley, Frank Sinatra, Mel Blanc. President Truman sends a peacetime message to the military audience. AFRS. (Total time: 104 minutes)

SUSPENSE (12-21-53) "Twas the Night Before Christmas" starring Greer Garson in a story about "a certain little girl on a certain Christmas Eve." Anne Whitfield co-stars in this Elliott Lewis production. AutoLite, CBS. (28:12)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23rd MERRY CHRISTMAS!

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (12-25-45) Jim and Marian Jordan star, with Arthur Q. Brian, Gale Gordon, Bea Benadaret, Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Fibber gets a Christmas gift from Doc Gamble, but he and Molly—and everyone else—can't figure out what it is! Johnson's Wax, NBC. (28:00)

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (12-16-48) "The Desert Shall rejoice" starring John Hodiak. The miracle of Christmas is relived in our day as a cynical tourist camp owner gives a room to Maria and Jose. James Hilton hosts. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (28:45)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-24-47) Hal Peary, as Gildy, goes shopping for Leroy's model airplane and makes plans to play Santa at church. Kraft Foods, NBC. (27:50)

CAMPBELL PLAYHOUSE (12-24-39) "A Christmas Carol" starring Lionel Barrymore in his fourth appearance as Ebenezer Scrooge in this broadcast of Charles Dickens' story. Orson Welles, producer and host of the series, narrates this radio classic. Campbell Soup, CBS. (32:15; 28:35)

BING CROSBY SHOW (12-25-52) Guest Gary Crosby joins Bing and Jud Conlon's Rhythmaires in this traditional Christmas program. Ken Carpenter, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra. Lots of holiday music (including "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," "Jingle Bells," "The Christmas Song" and, of course "White Christmas") and no commercials! General Electric, CBS. (29:28)

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

DECEMBER 1995

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30th
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (1-2-49) Ozzie thinks women allow men to win simply to make them feel better. He competes with Harriet in a knitting contest to prove that men are superior to women! Lots of fun with New Year's resolutions. Cast features John Brown, Tommy Bernard and Henry Blair. Verne Smith announces. International Silver Company, NBC. (28:34)

LES ELGART AND HIS ORCHESTRA (12-31-64 to 1-1-65) New Year's Eve remote broadcast from the Sherman House in Chicago. George Stone announces. Musical selections include "Why Don't You Do Right?" "You Made Me Love You," "Auld Lang Syne," "Skyliner," "Boogie Woogie Twist," and "Button Up your Overcoat." Broadcast from 11:55 pm to 12:30 am Chicago time. Sustaining, NBC. (31:05)

GUNSMOKE (1-1-56) "Puckett's New Year" starring William Conrad as Matt Dillon, U.S. Marshall, with Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot, Georgia Ellis as Kitty Russell, Howard McNear as Doc Adams, with Ralph Moody as Puckett. At the end of the year, a prospector seeks to kill the man who left him to die in a snowstorm. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (21:40)

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (12-30-35) An early McGee program finds Fibber and Molly all dressed up for a night on the town to celebrate the arrival of the new year. Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees, with Hugh Studebaker, Emery Darcy, Harlow Wilcox, Rico Marcelli's orchestra, Audrey Coll and her violin. Broadcast from Chicago, heard locally on WLS. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (29:35)

CHAMPAGNE MUSIC OF LAWRENCE WELK (12-31-70 to 1-1-71) New Year's Eve remote broadcast from the Hollywood Palladium. Music includes "High Tide Boogie," "The Song is You," "The Land of Dreams" (featuring Peanuts Hucko), "What the World Needs Now," "Mame," "Muskrat Ramble," and "Beer Barrel Polka" (featuring Myron Floren). Celebrate with the countdown before "Auld Lang Syne." Broadcast from 11:56 pm to 12:25 am, Pacific Standard Time. Sustaining, NBC. (29:00)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-31-47) Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve has three parties to go to on New Year's Eve. Hal Peary stars with Lillian Randolph, Walter Tetley, Dick LeGrand, Earl Ross, Louise Erickson. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30:17)

JANUARY 1996

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6th
ADVENTURES BY MORSE "CITY OF THE DEAD"
Chapters 1 thru 5

Today we begin an exciting series by the great Carlton E. Morse, creator of *I Love A Mystery* and *One Man's Family*.

"The City of the Dead" (syndicated in 1944) stars Elliott Lewis as Captain Bart Friday with Richard LeGrand as Doc Tooner and Janet Waldo as Phyllis Carroll.

There are ten 25-minute episodes in this thrill-packed adventure and we'll broadcast the first five chapters today. The remaining chapters will be presented on January 13.

Chapter 1— The City of the Dead is an old graveyard presided over by Mayor Joshua Friday (the caretaker). The adventure begins with phantom church bells, shrouded monsters and a young couple's car being stolen. Mayor Friday and his friend Doc Tooner insist the young couple stay for the night, locking their doors behind them.

Chapter 2— "I've Dug Up Something Ghastly"

Chapter 3— "The Body That Walked Off"

Chapter 4— "Old Clawfoot Again"

Chapter 5— "The Skeleton Walks In"

SATURDAY, JANUARY 13th
ADVENTURES BY MORSE
"CITY OF THE DEAD"
Chapters 6 thru 10

Today we conclude the exciting series by Carlton E. Morse, creator of *I Love A Mystery* and *One Man's Family*.

Chapter 6— "The Ghoul in the Grave"

Chapter 7— "Captain Friday vanishes"

Chapter 8— "The Kidnapping of Clawfoot"

Chapter 9— "The Trail of the Phantom Church Bell"

Chapter 10— "Where The Pearls Were Hidden."

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20th
GEORGE BURNS CENTENNIAL
1896 — 1996

George Burns was born January 20, 1896 and today, precisely 100 years later, we celebrate his Centennial!

George and his wife Gracie Allen entertained radio fans royally for eighteen years, from 1932 until 1950 when they made a smooth transition to television.

During our centennial salute we'll have lots of sound clips from the radio career of Burns and Allen as well as some of George's musical efforts and a few early George and Gracie comedy recordings.

Plus these complete broadcasts:

BURNS AND ALLEN (2-10-41) Broadcasting from Chicago to entertain the troops at Fort Sheridan, George and Gracie star with Artie Shaw and his orchestra, the Three Smoothies, and Senor Lee, with announcer Jimmy Wallington. Lots of topical chatter about Chicago and a visit from the city's Mayor Edward J. Kelly. Spam, NBC. (30:00)

BURNS AND ALLEN (11-9-43) Gracie blackmails guest Jack Benny into permitting George to sing on the Benny show. George sings "Ain't Misbehavin'." Bill Goodwin announces, music by Felix Mills and the orchestra. Swan Soap, CBS. (29:00)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (1-14-48) Bing Crosby welcomes guest George Burns who has decided to leave Gracie and go out on his own

as a singer. "Sugar Throat" Burns and Bing sing "It Might As Well Be Spring." Cast includes singer Evelyn Knight, the Rhythmairs, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, announcer Ken Carpenter. Philco, ABC. (30:00)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27th

OUR MISS BROOKS (10-24-48) Eve Arden stars as the Madison High School English teacher. Everyone conspires to "keep Miss Brooks from buying an alligator bag so we can give it to her for her birthday." Gale Gordon is Mr. Conklin, Jeff Chandler is Mr. Boynton, and Richard Crenna is Walter Denton. Palmolive Soap, Lustre Creme Shampoo, Colgate Tooth Powder, CBS. (29:14)

ESCAPE (3-14-48) "Log of the Evening Star" starring Jack Webb as the first mate of a South Seas schooner, Evening Star. A dead sea captain apparently has returned from his watery grave to reclaim his wife and ship. Cast features Alan Reed (in an excellent dramatic performance), Gail Page, Luis Van Rooten. Sustaining, CBS. (27:05)

ADVENTURES OF TOPPER (8-31-45) Roland Young recreates his original screen role as Cosmo Topper in the radio series based on the best selling novel by Thorne Smith. Ghosts Marian and George Kirby are played by Frances Chaney and Paul Mann; Mrs. Topper is Hope Emerson. Topper feigns illness to avoid visiting his mother-in-law. Dick Kollmar announces. Post Toasties, NBC. (27:58)

DORIS DAY SHOW (3-28-52) Doris welcomes guest Danny Thomas, her co-star in the Warner Bros. movie "I'll See You In My Dreams." They recreate a scene from the film, portraying Mr. and Mrs. Gus Kahn, the songwriter. Sustaining, CBS. (29:19)

ROGUE'S GALLERY (4-4-46) Dick Powell stars as private detective Richard Rogue. A death house inmate wants Rogue to retrieve stolen jewels, get the reward and give the money to his daughter. Fitch Shampoo, MBS. (29:08)

SCREEN GUILD THEATRE (8-12-46) "Devil and Miss Jones" starring Van Johnson, Donna Reed and Guy Kibbee in a radio version of the 1941 motion picture. A millionaire masquerades as a clerk in his own department store to investigate employee complaints. Lady Esther Products, CBS. (29:13)



COMING IN FEBRUARY
Jack Benny Month

DECEMBER 1995

"When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670 Monday thru Friday 11:00 P.M. to Midnight

*Chuck Schaden's
10-year
run of
Old Time
Radio
Classics
ended
on WBBM
December 1, 1995.
Now...*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
4 Lone Ranger Cinnamon Bear # 11	5 Bob and Ray Cinnamon Bear # 12	6 Ellery Queen Cinnamon Bear # 13	7 Ozzie and Harriet Cinnamon Bear # 14	8 Fibber McGee & Molly Cinnamon Bear # 15
11 Sgt. Preston Cinnamon Bear # 16	12 Our Miss Brooks Cinnamon Bear # 17	13 Lights Out Cinnamon Bear # 18	14 Red Skelton Cinnamon Bear # 19	15 Nero Wolfe Cinnamon Bear # 20
18 Damon Runyon Theatre Cinnamon Bear # 21	19 Life of Riley Cinnamon Bear # 22	20 Suspense Cinnamon Bear # 23	21 Screen Directors' Playhouse: "Miracle on 34th Street" Parts 1 and 2 Cinnamon Bear # 24	22 Cinnamon Bear # 25
25 Great Gildersleeve Cinnamon Bear # 26	26 Stan Freberg # 5 Abbott & Costello Pt 1	27 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Gunsmoke	28 Martin & Lewis Show Strange Dr. Weird	29 Lone Ranger Sgt. Preston

JANUARY 1996

"When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670 Monday thru Friday 11:00 P.M. to Midnight

*...now
tune in to
When Radio Was
with
Stan Freberg
Monday
thru
Friday
from
11 p.m. - Midnight
on
WMAQ-AM 670*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Suspense Burns & Allen Pt. 1	2 Burns & Allen Pt. 2 Dimension X	3 Green Hornet Fibber McGee Pt. 1	4 Fibber McGee Pt. 2 Lights Out	5 The Shadow Bob and Ray
8 Jack Benny Life of Riley Pt. 1	9 Life of Riley Pt. 2 Dragnet	10 Family Theatre Abbott & Costello Pt. 1	11 Abbott & Costello Pt.2 Boston Blackie	12 Lone Ranger Sgt. Preston
15 Gangbusters Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	16 Charlie McCarthy Pt. 2 Suspense	17 Directors Playhouse Stan Freberg #6 Pt 1	18 Stan Freberg #6 Pt 2 Six Shooter	19 The Shadow Lum and Abner
22 Nero Wolfe Martin & Lewis Pt. 1	23 Martin & Lewis Pt. 2 Gunsmoke	24 Damon Runyon Theatre Great Gildersleeve Pt. 1	25 Great Gildersleeve Pt. 2 The Saint	26 Lone Ranger Sgt. Preston
29 Mysterious Traveler Our Miss Brooks Pt. 1	30 Our Miss Brooks Pt. 2 Escape	31 Box Thirteen Ozzie & Harriet Pt. 1		

An Old Radioland Road Map

BY ED KNAPP

While rummaging through an old desk recently, I made a magnificent, long-forgotten "find"—an aged road map. Unfolding the wrinkled, yellowing packet, I immediately became aware of the fact that it was unlike any regular road atlas.

The formative map outline of the United States was scribbled with once very familiar names: Preston, Webber City, Pine Ridge, River's End, Homeville, and Glen Falls. Studying the well-worn map, I recalled that once I had used this detailed graph extensively during the 1930s and '40s; my guide to the most listened to radio friends on the dial.

The folks living in the marked spots on this special map were as real to life as my next door neighbors. With its aid I was able to travel daily the highways and byways, without missing a turn, to visit my favorite people: The Singing Lady, Nora Drake, Pretty Kitty Kelly, The Shadow, Amos 'n' Andy, Corliss Archer, and Young Dr. Malone — via radio

How could those of us growing up during radio's golden years ever forget the quiet little towns we frequented across the dial, joining daily with so many heartwarming friends of the media.

Wouldn't it be fun to take this newly discovered Radioland map and venture back to those familiar sounding places? Luckily, we were afforded the opportunity to live for a time in one of a hundred different places as indicated on our unique map, thanks to the magic of radio. With our special airwaves friends, we shared moments

Edwin S. Knapp of Three Rivers, Michigan is a retired professional photographer who spends his free time writing and collecting.

of adventure, mystery, humorous situations, and sad and happy times, together.

Let's return to yesteryear to renew fond friendships and recall cherished times.

The first stop on our Radioland map will be at **Rushville Center**. On any weekday afternoon we could drop in at the lumber yard and find **Ma Perkins** and Shuffle behind the counter. Between customers they would try to find time to discuss Fay's current dilemma. Seems that Ma's daughter had only recently been widowed and she still had a young daughter to raise. Hopefully, all will come out all right in the Oxydol wash.

A short drive away, **Scattergood Baines** would be found crossing one of **Coldwater's** dirt streets. Possessed of sharp wit and understanding, Scattergood was always quoting words of wisdom and philosophy to crusty Pliny Pickett, the town skeptic.

A rather extensive drive brought us to **Hollywood's** Palm Drive where we made an unexpected call, hoping to find out how things were between lawyer Gil Whitney and his romance with **Helen Trent**.

A noontime stopover in **Hartville** would give us an opportunity to rest for a time at **Just Plain Bill** Davidson's barber shop and get a trim. While there we caught up on the local gossip and inquired about Bill's daughter Nancy, her husband Kerry Donovan and their son Wiki.

Next, a trip to **River's End** was in order, especially if you weren't feeling up to par. We would contact nurse Judy Price for an evening appointment to see **Dr. Christian**. The kindly old doctor would likely prescribe "lots of rest and quiet."

Often we took an afternoon journey to **Pine River** to talk with **Valiant Lady** Joan



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE lived with Mr. & Mrs Silo at Simmons Corners in Tucker County.

Barrett to evaluate the circumstances of her romantic interest in Paul Morrison. Generally each of our visits was limited to fifteen minutes. We still had to find time to call on **Our Gal Sunday** at Black Swan Hall in **Virginia**; **Pepper Young's Family**, to discuss troubled times in **Elmwood**; to **Glen Falls** to see **Big Sister** Ruth Evans; and never forget that **Portia Faces Life** in **Parkerstown**.

After so much drama, pathos and tears with heavy organ accompaniment, we were ready for more lighthearted visiting.

Consulting our map and shifting gears, we followed new roadways to **Wistful Vista** and its residents **Fibber McGee and Molly**. There were always lots of laughs in the McGee parlor with so many friends dropping by, news of Fibber's latest invention, and the constant threat posed by the disorganized hall closet.

Following a fork in the road, it was only a short drive to **Summerfield**, where the **Great Gildersleeve** was city Water Commissioner. Gildy was either busy chasing down a leaky water main or his soft-voiced heart throb Leila Ransom.

Journeying on, we soon arrived at the quiet neighborhood street of **Shady Lane** Avenue. We would give Daisy a few pets and visit briefly with **Blondie** and Dagwood Bumstead, before he had to run-off to his job at the J. C. Dithers Construction Company.

Pulling up in front of the **Jack Benny** residence in **Beverly Hills**, we were always assured of fun and we could often see Jack's Maxwell parked at the curb.

Holding fast to the roads outlined on our map, we made several other enjoyable junkets.

We stopped at the Jot Em Down Store in

RADIOLAND ROAD MAP

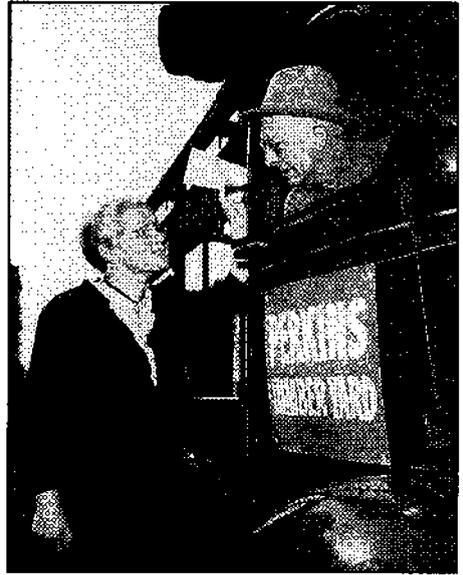
the heart of *Pine Ridge* to confer with **Lum and Abner**, proprietors, about the up and coming picnic social. Then there was a favorite afternoon visit to the little house halfway up in the next block in *Crooper, Illinois* to chat with **Vic and Sade** along with Rush and Uncle Fletcher. We sped along to *Sycamore Terrace* to say hello to **Baby Snooks** and her Daddy; then turned into the direction of Town Hall Tonight for a conversation with dry-witted **Fred Allen**, strolling with Fred down *Allen's Alley* to interview the eccentric residents.

Some of our other side trips took us to *Hometown, USA* for some fun with **Burns and Allen**; to *Chicazolla* to see the **Johnson Family** and confer with lawyer Philpotts; to *Centerville* to hear the clarion voice of Mrs. Aldrich as she shouted from the back door, "Henry... **Henry Aldrich**" to bring a string of humorous adventures with Henry and his pal Homer Brown.

There were times during our youth when



DR. CHRISTIAN (Jean Hersholt) and Nurse Judy Price (Rosemary DeCamp) had their office in River's End.



MA PERKINS (Virginia Payne) and Shuffle Shober (Charles Egleston) worked at Ma's lumber yard in Rushville Center.

the Radioland road map came into its own as we sought stimulating moments of high adventure after school.

The varying routes lead us to *Hudson High* where, if we were lucky, we just might catch **Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy** between dangerous and exciting trips to the Philippines, the Himalayas, Africa and other global quests. Jack's around the world companions in pulsing exploits were Uncle Jim, Betty and Billy.

Motoring some distance from Jack's place, but a definite must on our radio journey, was a daily fifteen minute stopover in the quiet rural community of *Simmons Corners, Tucker County*. Radio's red-headed **Little Orphan Annie** and her trusted canine companion Sandy lived on the outskirts of town with guardians Mr. and Mrs. Silo.

Traveling from the country to the city, *Metropolis* was next on our list. We planned a few hasty minutes to go to the



HELEN TRENT (Julie Stevens) lived in Hollywood and proved that romance in life need not be over because a woman is 35.



VIC AND SADE (Art Van Harvey and Bernadine Flynn) lived in the small house halfway up in the next block in Crooper, Illinois.

newspaper office of the *Daily Planet* to see reporter Clark Kent. According to his co-worker Lois Lane, Clark was out, following a story of the latest escapade of **Superman**.

We consulted the Radioland map often on weekday afternoons, enabling us to locate many different locales.

On the *western plains*, riding herd with **Tom Mix** and his horse Tony on law breakers. Somehow, we still found time to venture to the naval base to talk with **Don Winslow of the Navy** about plans to combat his evil adversary, the Scorpion. A ship-board adventure was next as we sailed the *China Seas* with **Terry and the Pirates** in search of the insidious Dragon Lady. And driving to the headquarters of **Captain Midnight** as the appointed hour of the airplane attack, he shared with us his eternal battle to defeat the unscrupulous Ivan Shark.

Hungering for still more excitement, we followed the map to *Crime City* to aid **Dick**

Tracy and Junior in their fight against evil-doers wearing so many different faces. Flying aircraft daily from the *Kansas* Airport we shared the **Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen** before we went on to the city of *Niagra* for a rocket ship trip to *Saturn* with **Buck Rogers in the 25th Century**.

At least three times a week we would journey again to the *western United States* to ride with the **Lone Ranger** and Tonto in a fight to eliminate six-gun renegades; or to don a deep-sea diver's suit for a depth dive with **Jack Westaway** in search of a lost sea treasure on ocean's floor.

Well, the clock on the dashboard tells us today's journey is about over. It's time to fold the old Radioland map and put it back where I found it in the desk. Next time we take out the map, perhaps we will travel to Elm Street, Parkerstown, Grand Central Station, the Sky Ranch, Five Points, the Valley of Fear, Death Valley, the Little Theatre Off Times Square, and Blair General Hospital. ■

MY LAST CHILDHOOD CHRISTMAS

BY FR. KEVIN SHANLEY, O.Carm

It wasn't just an ordinary train set that I had received that Christmas of 1938. It was a wind-up train painted bright red with a yellow trim. The gleaming engine pulled a tender, two passenger cars, a freight car with real sliding doors, and a caboose with red reflectors.

This train rode on tracks that could be set in either an oval pattern or, using the switching track, in a figure eight.

Either way, the train could take me on childhood journeys of fantasy anywhere in the world. In that magical week between Christmas and New Year, the train ran constantly.

Railroads and trains were important in our family. My immigrant father often regaled us with tales of his years working for the Great Southern Railroad in Ireland. As a signalman, he was sent to all parts of the south of Ireland to repair lines damaged by sudden storms or train wrecks. He managed to come to the rescue, often just in time to avert greater disaster. He also told of watching the brilliant sunrise over the coast of County Cork, or the setting sun on the Atlantic coast. His tales included nights of working to keep trains moving, and the fascinating and sometimes comical people he met along the way.

To my child's mind, then, trains were not just for traveling. They were the gateway to adventure I wanted to open both in reality and imagination.

Santa Claus, when I was seven, was still a partial belief but I grew to realize that he needed help from my parents. The Great Depression wasn't really over that Christmas of 1938, so we knew we could ask for one toy from Santa Claus, given in the

name, so our parents told us, of the Christ Child. It was his birthday we were celebrating.

My longing for a set of trains was matched by my hesitancy to ask for such a relatively expensive gift. What if Mom and Dad just didn't have enough money for such a present? Was I asking for too much, and would I be disappointed?

Putting aside fear, I decided to risk all.

"What would you like Santa Claus and the Christ Child to bring you for Christmas?" my father asked in early December.

"A set of trains," was my only answer.

I noticed a slight look of puzzlement in my father's face but decided to stick to my original request.

"Trains," I repeated.

The long weeks of December dragged slowly by. Each day the newspaper printed a figure of Santa Claus with the number of shopping days left till Christmas.

School activities at St. Aloysius continued steadily in Miss Molloy's second grade.

But trains filled my waking thoughts much more than school work, or even praying for snow to make Lookout Hill in nearby Lincoln Park our winter playground. Trains just seemed to push out most other thoughts.

The parlor door was always locked on Christmas morning when we got up to attend Mass at St. Aloysius Church. Mom and Dad trimmed the tree, usually bought at the last-minute sales on West Side Avenue, and then neatly arranged our gifts underneath. We could peek through the keyhole with hope and imagination.

The trip home from Mass through Lin-

coln Park was much quicker on Christmas morning. After breakfast we rushed into the parlor.

There it was! A set of trains gleaming in a stiff cardboard box. My trains, my dream fulfilled, my adventures begun.

For the other Christmases of my childhood, there were other gifts but I don't really remember them.

Each year, and many times in between, the trains came out. At times the tracks were laid under the expanse of the Christmas tree, more often in open space on the parlor rug. Hours seemed to pass as minutes as the trains whirred around the tracks and took my imagination on great adventures of happiness and excitement.

In December of 1942, I was in Sr. James Marie's sixth grade class. I was eleven then, and our country was at war in Europe, the Pacific and elsewhere.

That Advent season was a time for praying for peace, and preparing for the coming of the Prince of Peace. I was even selected to be one of the Wise Men in our class Christmas Pageant.

"But Christmas means more than receiving," intoned Sr. James Marie. "It is also giving."

Sister mentioned that a lot of poor children, right in our own city, would have a Christmas without gifts. I couldn't imagine such a thing happening. No gifts!

Then Sr. James Marie reminded us that we were growing up and out of our childhood toys. She added quickly that the firemen at the Boyd Avenue Station were collecting used toys to repair and distribute to poor children. Did we have any old toys that could be repaired and given to the poor?

Girls spoke of their unused dolls and baby carriages that could be used by other children; boys offered skates, trucks and other toys.

I was silent.

Not my trains! No! I knew that my beautiful red and yellow trains were a bit on the shabby side and the doors of the freight car didn't work too well. But the thought of giving up my prized gift was too much. I just wouldn't do it!

As December wore slowly on, I began to think again of the trains, how much happiness I'd had with them, and how much joy they could bring to a poor child.

It had snowed the night before when I looked out the parlor window and down at my trains. I felt the first conscious pangs of growing up, of not being a little boy anymore.

The trains would go to someone else.

As I trudged through the snow down to the fire house, the box of trains under my arm, I began to realize both the joys of giving and the pain of parting.

Mom had seen me take out my box of trains that morning.

"I'm taking them down to the fire house for the poor children," I explained.

She bent down and kissed me. No words. But I knew that she was pleased.

A ruddy-faced fireman greeted me at the door of the fire station.

"These are for some poor child," I said, trying to be both brave and generous. "And they're in pretty good condition."

He tugged at the box of trains and I realized that I was still holding on. He understood and waited for my grasp to loosen.

"Thanks," he smiled. "I'm sure some little boy is going to be very happy this Christmas, and you will be, too."

The walk home was mixed with the gladness of giving and the pain of giving up a precious memory.

I knew then that I was no longer a little boy. I had left a good part of my childhood at the fire house. I was happy and sad.

It was, indeed, my last childhood Christmas. ■

GRANDFATHER

By RUSS RENNAKER

Even when I was just a child my grandfather always seemed old to me.

That may partially have been because he wore a beard all his life. It must have been dark when he was younger, but I only remember it as white.

Of course he couldn't have been all that old when I was a kid. He was only eighty-four years old when he left us.

Grandfather was six feet and two inches tall and in those days he weighed about 200 and some pounds. But Grandfather was never "overweight." Most of that 200 pounds was just plain muscle. As a small boy he came to Indiana, with his parents, in a Conestoga wagon drawn by oxen.

He helped his father cut down the trees to build their first house. Northern Indiana was still a dense forest in the 1800's.

I remember one summer, I must have been all of ten years old, he took me hunting. We were walking slowly through a wooded area, his old Civil War long-barreled muzzle-loader slung over one shoulder. Suddenly he stopped and cocked his head back at an angle. With his left hand he pointed to the top of a tree some feet in front of us. My eyes followed his pointing finger, but I saw nothing except the foliage. He carefully bent down and rested one knee on the soft earth. The long barrel of the rifle swung slowly upward at the angle where he had been pointing. Still I

Russ Rennaker, of Kokomo, Indiana, was born in 1906 and obtained his amateur radio license at age 13. A retired broadcast engineer, he has worked at WBBM, Chicago and WJSV, Washington, D. C. He has written many articles and books about the golden days of radio.

saw nothing. There was a "boom" and a puff of black smoke came out of the muzzle of the rifle. A brown tree-squirrel about the size of a small kitten dropped into the leaves a few feet in front of us. I had heard my father tell about Grandfather's marksmanship. Now I was convinced.

Some time later he reloaded the rifle. He poured gunpowder into the muzzle from a leather pouch that hung from a strap over his shoulder. He took a lead ball, almost as large as a marble, out of another pouch and rammed that after the powder. Finally he took a small round patch of cloth, called "wadding," from his pants pocket and rammed that down the barrel.

"Now," he said, "would you like to take a whack at it?"

It was a dream I had always had. When I took it into my hands it almost brought me to my knees. I could not hold it horizontally and finally Grandfather helped me support it across the top of a rail fence.

I pointed it at a small bush a hundred yards away and pulled the trigger. I will never forget grandfather's chuckle as I tumbled backwards head-over-heels. Grandfather said, nonchalantly, "Oh. I forgot to tell you it kicks like a mule." I never fired that muzzle-loader again!

In the 1920's, when I was growing up, there were still large sections of wooded

area in northern Indiana. Every fall, after the harvest was finished, my father and my grandfather would spend days cutting down trees. They were mostly hardwoods; maple, walnut, hickory, and oak. Since there was no central heating in those days, large quantities of wood were stored to stoke the wood stoves during the winter.

I was not allowed to be around when they were felling the trees due to the danger but when it came time to saw up the logs that was a different matter.

At about twelve or thirteen years of age it fell to me to help Grandfather saw up the logs into fire-wood lengths. He would get on one end of the ten-foot cross-cut saw and little ol' me on the other. He would lift that cross-cut saw with one hand as if it was a two-foot hand saw and plunk it down on a log. "Come on, Son," he would say. "Time's a wastin'."

It was an uneven match from the beginning. Sometimes I felt as though I was just riding on my end of the saw. Grandfather would pull the ten-foot blade through a three foot diameter oak log like my mother slashed through a pound of butter with a table knife. When it came my turn to pull it back I tugged as hard as I could, but I always thought Grandfather was really pushing it toward me.

Grandfather never seemed to tire. After three or four pieces were cut I was ready to sit down on a stump and catch my breath. Grandfather stood there holding his end of the saw like a Viking of old. "Come on, Son," he would say. "You can rest when we're done. And we'll never get done with you sitting there."

I would hop up and grab hold of my end again pretending I was rested up. I never knew if Grandfather ever realized how uneven the match was, or even gave it another thought.

Years later, in another time and another place, whenever I felt like I did not have

the strength to go on, I would remember Grandfather.

"Come on, Son, time's a wastin'."

And somehow I always found strength to go on.

In the early days of radio, like many other boys my age, I built radios. This, of course, was before there were any manufactured ones.

Scars Robuck and the local Ten Cent Store were the best sources for parts. The crystal detector was the main item. It was a simple device. A small hunk of galena mounted on a base with a little arm suspended over it with a "cat-whisker" attached. The cat whisker was a small piece of wire, usually coiled to give it tension, attached to the arm over the crystal. The arm was movable so that the cat whisker could be moved around over the surface of the crystal to get the best point for reception. Of course it was like a modern day semi-conductor, but we didn't know that then.

There was usually some combination of coils of wire, the number of turns determined the frequency that was to be received. There were variable condensers for tuning and fixed condensers for other purposes. All easily obtained.

It was really remarkable how well those first crystal sets worked. Usually their listening range was confined to the local radio station, but some of the more sophisticated ones built by the more advanced amateur were capable of receiving signals from surrounding states.

Of course the life of the crystal set was abruptly ended with the invention of the vacuum tube. That brought on a whole new era in the world of radio.

But it was still a few months before industry decided radio was here to stay and they better get into the business of building radio sets. So I continued to build radios using the new vacuum tubes. I built

GRANDFATHER

them into all kinds of configurations. One of my favorites was a common cigar box. A local cigar store donated the boxes to me. One side of the box contained the tuning dials, switches and so forth. I could sell these sets for as much as \$25 or \$30. It became a little industry and a source of pocket money at a time in the country's economy when that was grateful.

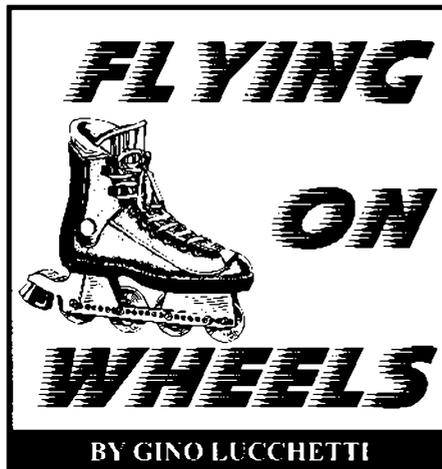
My grandfather, who must have been in his sixties at that time, was skeptical of this newfangled contraption I was so involved in. He said it was just a bunch of baloney and he didn't believe anyone heard what they said they did over it. But my mother was immersed in the soap operas of the day and she and my grandmother spent many an afternoon listening to the three tube set I had built for our own use. Of course that was before loud speakers were invented and you had to wear a pair of headphones over your ears.

So I decided to build a set for my grandmother so she could stay home and listen. Grandfather still scoffed at the idea. "Ma," he would say, "there must be something better you can do with your time." But grandmother, being a little strong willed, paid no attention.

Things went on for some time and I built radios for all the neighbors. One evening I had some reason to go over to my grandparents house which was just a half-mile down the road from ours. As I passed the front room window I looked in. There were Grandma and Grandpa huddled close to the radio, the earphones split between the two of them.

I never mentioned the incident to my grandfather, but later I asked Grandmother about it.

"Shucks," she said, "your grandpa never misses Amos and Andy, and he's crazy about the Lone Ranger." ■



Leisurely ambling along on the sidewalk recently, I was startled as a something—a human form—whizzed past me startlingly close, almost knocking me down, with no warning and in almost complete silence. It was a teenage humanoid zipping along on those newfangled things called "roller blades," the highly evolved generation of what we once called "roller skates." I watched with amazement as he disappeared down the sidewalk wafting along at a pretty good clip with apparently minimum effort, quite smoothly, even gracefully, and, to my further wonderment, with none of the noise I recalled from my roller skating days.

The new "skates," also called "in-line blades" are sleek, graceful and to their credit, quiet, compared to the clunky four-wheeled steel devices we used to skate with which were firmly clamped to our shoes. Those venerable skates made a very loud, distinctive noise as you skimmed along on a concrete sidewalk, with only slightly less noise when on an asphalt street. Cobblestone streets, of which there still were some back then, didn't make for skating at all; skating on them could shake your teeth loose in short order.

Looking back objectively, roller skates never were things of beauty compared to

"blades." Like a lot of things in the "olden days" utility and durability were the desirable qualities accepted at the expense of gaudy colors, fashion and glitz. Serviceable, yes; inexpensive, yes—chic, no! But just about any one could own a pair. They were wildly popular and were everywhere in their heyday; heavy, chunky, and they made a very distinctive noise as you skated along—a cross between a grinding noise and a rattling sound. A very distinctive sound, but not easily describable. You had to be there.

A clamp-on roller skate was a two-part steel platform, heel and sole, shaped like the bottom of a shoe. It was mounted atop two pairs of steel wheels, approximately 2" in diameter, fore and aft, each pair on its own axle. A sturdy leather strap coming from the semicircular steel rim or cup at the back cradled one's feet snugly in place. In order to fit all foot lengths the heel and sole parts could be spread and locked to accommodate any shoe. To hold your shoe and skate together there was a clamp, a pair of curved "claws," one on each side at the widest part of the foot that could hook over and onto the projecting edge of the sole of your shoe. The clamp claws were drawn together by a turnbuckle arrangement requiring a special device, a "skate key." The key was used to tighten the clamps firmly to the sole, and it could tighten or loosen the claws simultaneously, like the jaws of a vice. As you might guess, skates were not easy on shoes, so it was not a good idea to roller skate with your Sunday-go-to Meetin' shoes. Skates were responsible for many pairs of shoes that had loose soles that flapped annoyingly as you walked. Flapping of the sole was a non life-threatening epidemic condition among young skaters.

In spite of any drawbacks, skates were second only to "bikes" as a means of getting from here to there, or from home to

where the action was. In those golden "olden days" traffic was so sparse you could skate almost any where on the streets—an incomprehensible possibility considering today's bumper-to-bumper traffic. At busy thoroughfares you could still use the sidewalk and strollers accepted skaters with equanimity because the roller skate generation was considerate enough to respect the right of pedestrians. Yes, that's a slap at roller-bladers of the likes mentioned above.

Because of the few automobiles in those long-gone days, it was possible to play roller skate hockey on side streets for hours on end, have skating races, do "comparative" or "showing off" skating with your peers, or just "cruise" the neighborhood on those devices that put wings on your feet. To dazzle the girls you could get up a full head of steam, suddenly turn sideways and pull up sharply to brake, and the skittering steel wheels might shoot a few sparks! Man, was that keen!

I can also recall many skating expeditions to the Loop from just west of Cicero and Madison, a distance of over six miles, and to places as far as the Field Museum or the Shedd Aquarium on the lakefront, or just long, leisurely exploratory trips to unknown parts of town. They might begin in the morning and find you numble-legged unclamping those things at dusk that by then seemed to have turned to lead and weigh a ton apiece. For kids under 12 or 13, it widened the world considerably for little or no expense. Unless you developed a "hot box."

Like anything, roller skates wore out and required repairs. With use, a leather strap would wear or break, or a wheel wore out and you then experienced the trauma of a "hot box," a worn wheel that required replacement. This was probably a boy's first real foray into the world of mechanical repair and maintenance. It was invaluable

FLYING ON WHEELS

hands-on learning experience.

If you were a west-sider you went to the Chicago Skate Company on Lake Street just east of Cicero Avenue to buy your new wheels. Believe it or not, you could go right to the factory and buy a single skate wheel! What a difference from today trying to affect some repair, aside from the fact that you can't even find the factory, there's usually a prohibitive minimum purchase required that make a repair impractical, and parts clerks don't even deign to take care of some small fry for a minuscule order. Anyway, there were at least two grades of wheels. The cheapie wheel had a metal bushing. It didn't spin with that smooth purr of a ball bearing wheel, and it certainly didn't wear as long. The high-grade, really keen, hot-shot wheel had ball bearings, and you imagined you could virtually fly when you fitted those on your skates. Of course, like everything, you paid for the quality. Whereas the solid wheel probably cost a dime, the ball-bearing wheel maybe cost twenty cents—the cost of a movie plus a bag of pop corn. That translates to about six or seven dollars today. You naturally had to have the proper wrench for the job. And, if I'm not mistaken, the skate key also had a box end-wrench for that job. There were also special roller bearing wheels with wood or composition rims for use at skating rinks, of which there were quite a few scattered around the city.

West siders went to the Rainbow Rink on Madison Street, a bit west of Western Avenue, if memory serves. Ah, roller rinks, with the majestic organ sonorously playing "The Skaters' Waltz," "The Blue Danube," and other appropriate waltz music for the skaters who glided endlessly around and around the rink. Roller rinks are casualties of today's "progress" all the

myriad new attractions and distractions of today that require so little effort, skill or imagination to enjoy without working a sweat—and the high cost of insurance, because today any accident, no matter how slight or even if self-inflicted due to carelessness or stupidity, is ticket on the legal sweepstakes jackpot. Had today's litigious atmosphere prevailed when I was a kid, with the number of scrapes, bruises, contusions and lacerations I stoically endured, as everyone did, by the way, while skating, I'd have been a millionaire.

I was shocked and depressed when recently I spotted the current version of roller skates: a kid on plastic roller skates! A pair of goshawful *orange* plastic roller skates, to add colorful insult to injury. How brutal and wrenching it is to be awakened from a nostalgic reverie and dragged into the harsh reality of the nineties. I relived the scene in the landmark movie, "The Graduate," when an uncle whispered into the ear of his naive, young nephew, played by Dustin Hoffman, the single word: "Plastics." Little did I, or could I have, realized it would also be a wake-up call for me one day. At any rate, what with traffic and things being what they are, the kid skating blissfully on those abominations would never know that real roller skates were the "Open Sesame" to the world of exploration and adventure. For that, plastic just doesn't cut it.

But harking back to "blades," those space-age counterparts of the humble roller skate, I wonder if it's easy to make the transition from the dinosaur-age skates to the stylish, colorful, custom-fitted, hot, booted-type "blades" without risking life or limb. And even if an old dog can master the trick of these new devices, is it worth the gamble of life or limb of the skater or pedestrians to take to the public walks or automobile thoroughfares? I don't know, but I'm drawn to the idea. ■



OUR READERS WRITE

WE GET LETTERS

CHICAGO— As a charter subscriber to *Nostalgia Digest*, it is with great pleasure that I renew my subscription. I go back as far as WLTD and the programs over the years have gone along with me to numerous vacations, four hospital confinements, and many pleasurable journeys into the past. Recently, while “D-Xing” I discovered, on Saturday evening at 1040 on the AM radio dial, WHO, Des Moines, two hours of old time radio... exactly where it all started for me 50 years ago. Great success with the great entertainment. —**JIM L. CLARK**

DARIEN, IL— Please keep up the great work. I look forward to each Saturday afternoon. I am 45 and never heard most of this material and I really enjoy it. —**JOHN AGUZINO**

CHICAGO— I would like to ask about the relationship of the Lone Ranger, his nephew Dan Reid, and Britt Reid, the Green Hornet. I know that Dan Reid Sr., whose wife Linda was from Virginia, was the Lone Ranger’s brother. I’m sure I heard you on one of your programs talking about this relationship a couple of years ago. My husband missed that show and doesn’t believe they are related. —**DOROTHY J. FRENCH-GREEN**

(ED. NOTE— According to the legend (and the script writers of the Lone Ranger and the Green Hornet), Dan Reid (Sr.) and his younger brother John were among the Texas Rangers who were ambushed by the ruthless Butch Cavendish gang at Bryant’s Gap. Captain Dan Reid was killed in that ambush, but his brother John survived (and was nursed back to health by an Indian named Tonto who came upon the scene). John vowed to avenge the death of his older brother and the other Texas Rangers by becoming the Lone Ranger. He also set out to find his brother’s son, his nephew Dan, who frequently rode with his uncle and his faithful Indian companion. Subsequently, Dan Reid (Jr.) went east to further his education and find work. He married and had a son, Britt who became a newspaper owner and publisher. But he also followed in the footsteps of his *grand*

uncle, and became The Green Hornet. The Lone Ranger fought the bad guys in the western United States, and the Green Hornet fought the bad guys in the eastern United States, but they were a generation apart. Nowhere in the pages of history do we find a reference to a Linda Reid from Virginia, whom you say was married to Dan, Sr. ...but that’s about as far as we’ll climb the Reid family tree!)

CHICAGO— Traveling through World War II with you for the past four years has been a very memorable experience, since I missed it the first time around. (I’m a Baby Boomer!) Thanks for rerunning that Home Front series, it is so well done. I was able to attend the *TWTD* 25th Anniversary celebration at the Swissotel and enjoyed the afternoon thoroughly. Being a Boomer, I recognized Bill Idelson to be “Herman Glimcher” of Dick Van Dyke fame as soon as he stepped on stage. Thanks for sharing all your memories. —**MARY KAY VALENTI**

AKRON, OHIO— It’s time for another two year renewal to the *Nostalgia Digest* and also to let you know that Akron has just opened “Inventure Place,” the National Inventor’s Hall of Fame. I haven’t been through it yet, waiting for the crowds to die down. I really enjoyed the *Nostalgia Digest* World War II articles, especially “Yesterday in America” by Bill Elwell. Your entire staff of writers does an excellent job of bringing us the past. —**PAUL MERLO**

NORTHLAKE, IL— Thank goodness the war is over! You did a wonderful job with the material and I admit to choking up more than a few times, but I’m looking forward to getting back to mystery and comedy programs. We’re going on a trip soon and I’ve already packed the tapes I plan to take, but I’ve found there’s something missing. I enjoy your comments and enthusiasm. Please thank Ken Alexander for his interesting articles in the *Digest*. There are times when I swear we shared the same childhood. He brings back such great memories. —**A. C. HENDERSON**



MORE LETTERS

CROWN POINT, INDIANA— I really enjoyed the Home Front series and, since my mother would have celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary this past spring had my father lived, I think she will enjoy it too, even though she spent the war years in her native Australia. I will miss the radio coverage of WW II. I don't know what my fascination is with it, as I am only 48, but perhaps it is that I am a result of that far-flung war. Had my father not been in the Navy, stationed in Australia because of the war, I would not have been born. I also spent some time studying in northeastern France, an area occupied early on by the Germans, and there was much evidence, some of it very touching, of the horrors of war. During some travel time, I had the opportunity to see Dachau, and was twice in divided Berlin, with the aftermath of the war still so evident in East Berlin at that time. I have heard many first-person stories from various people involved directly in the war, and I somehow feel a closer connection to those events than many my age. Hopefully, others now feel that same connection, thanks to your coverage. Thanks for really enjoyable listening. I wish there was more good radio listening available, because I just don't have the time to sit and watch that darn television, but can accomplish all sorts of things and more enjoyably while listening to your radio programs. —**PAM RANDOLPH**

CHICAGO— Well, we did it! Went through the war and through the four years we've had smiles and tears. Saturday has been a day for memories. As I pulled the last tape out of the player (the Bob Hope Show), I said to my husband, "It was a pleasant hardship reliving it all and learning, also, because we were just kids in junior high." Chuck, a job well done. —**MILDRED BLEIER**

WEST CHICAGO, IL— Please accept my renewal subscription. I really do enjoy this wonderful publication. Up until two years ago, I would pass it on to my dad in Ohio, but since he died at the age of 100 in July, 1993, I have been sending it to my sister, who also lives in Ohio. She's as much a fan

of old radio as I am, but since a station in Cleveland stopped their old radio broadcasts last year, she's not able to listen to any programs. I do want to thank you for all the great shows on the end of World War II. I was 12 years old at that time and I remember it all, vividly. I can't recall ever having been so moved as I was as I listened to your presentation of "Fourteen August." Having Orson Welles speak those emotional words of Norman Corwin brought chills to me. Ken Alexander's remembrance of "The Ragman, the Peddler and the Good Humor Man" in the *Digest* brought back more memories from my childhood in New Philadelphia, Ohio. We were visited regularly by Mr. Adelstein, the ragman. In our family of seven kids, my mom would let us take turns in getting the money from the rags we saved. My sisters would put large rocks in the burlap bag, but Mr. Adelstein was too smart for them. I can still hear him call, "Rags, Iron, Rags, Iron." We also had "Bess" Edwards, the scissor sharpener man. Chuck, thanks so much for all the enjoyable pleasure you've given me and all the devotees of old time radio. —**MOLLIE TAYLOR**

CHICAGO— We've hit our seventies and love your Saturday afternoon programs — ordinarily. We've had it with the WW II nostalgia orgy. You may not realize it, but for those who actively participated in the war, these memories are very painful (also for those of us who anxiously waited at home). Cases in Point:

1. My husband, who skippered an LSM in the Pacific and was on his way to the invasion of Japan when the bomb was dropped, seldom wants to talk about it — or hear about it. His post-bomb duties took him to Nagasaki; thereafter they headed home and had a fire on the ship in the middle of the Pacific. After 48 years together, I have learned of these things sporadically — and only in bits and pieces.

2. My dear friend of many years served as a nurse during the Battle of the Bulge. It is only recently that she has mentioned this to me and that was because she was fed up with the media-hype of events that she really doesn't care to remember. She says that a simple memorial service for those that died there and attended by the survivors was the only comforting event that happened this year. A simple, respectful

remembrance and a sincere expression of a nation's gratitude is appropriate. And then let's switch gears and get to the business at hand and try to dedicate our efforts to the principles for which the war was fought.

Throughout the years, your program is a delight in providing your listeners with a step backward to a time of gentle humor and sweet remembrance, not only for us senior citizens, but also for our children and grandchildren who get to understand us better as well as their own time through a review of the past. Good luck! We love you. — **ANN P. WENNERBERG**

CHICAGO — My mother and I want to thank you for four wonderful years of World War II radio coverage. We can't understand why some listeners wrote and complained that you broadcast "too much World War II stuff." We wish you had carried more World War II stuff! We found the programs absolutely thrilling; they ranged from funny to serious, from heartwarming to emotional. We cried when President Roosevelt died, and cheered when General Eisenhower came home. We dropped everything on Saturday afternoons just to listen in. Although we are happy that the war is over, we are saddened by the coverage coming to an end. However, we have many of your shows on tape, and will be happily continuing the coverage of the war here on the home front. Thank you again, and we look forward to a repeat of the broadcasts in the year 2016, the 75th anniversary of World War II. — **OXSANA MELNYK**

TINLEY PARK, IL — I first started listening to your show back in the '70s when I read in the paper that you were broadcasting the Cinnamon Bear. I had completely forgotten about it and immediately wanted to hear it again, as I listened to it in the late '40s after school while drying dishes in our kitchen. I couldn't get your station in very well at all, and finally gave up. Then years later, when you went to a different station, I could get the signal better so I became a fan of your Saturday show, and have been hooked ever since. I hate it when I have to miss a Saturday show to go to a wedding, or if I'm out of town, etc. I love being home, in my sewing room, quilting, and enjoying the old days. As kids, my mom didn't let us listen to the radio a whole lot, so most everything I hear is new to me, so it's like I'm hearing

everything for the first time. I have especially enjoyed the World War II 50th Anniversary series for the past four years. I was born in 1940 and was so young that I don't actually remember anything about it. I am enclosing a check for \$5 and my boxtop for a copy of the One Man's Family Album. While listening to One Man's Family on your show today, I was thinking that I wish I was able to send in for the album they were talking about. And, presto, you said we could! Just as you were telling about it, our electricity went out (for the second time during your show) so I had to switch to my Walkman quickly. I wish you would play One Man's Family all the time, not just in the summer. — **GAIL MASLAN**

HOBART, INDIANA — I am sending you a boxtop and a check for \$5 for a copy of the Barbour Family Album. I got hooked on the series last summer. In fact, I would be upset with my daughter when she would plan a shopping trip for the time in the afternoon when the Barbour family was on the air. — **CAROLYN MOORE**

SOUTH ELGIN, IL — On your show of September 9, I heard about the One Man's Family album. Since both my husband and I remember this as part of the family evening program in his house, we are asking you to mail one to us. A quickie Christmas gift for his Mother who always listened and demanded silence from the kids and her husband during the program. — **ANN SLOMAN FAZEL**

WAUWATOSA, WISCONSIN — We try to listen each Saturday on WNIZ, which we can receive on a mid-sixties transistorized FM radio. We must turn the rabbit ears "just right" to eliminate interference from adjacent or Michigan stations. Sometimes we receive "orders" from our daughter to record One Man's Family or some other favorite. Send the album. No Bactine boxtop, hope Irish Spring will do! — **ELMER A. GUTKNECHT**

DES PLAINES, IL — I love *TWTD* on Saturday afternoons. I heard many of these programs the first time around! Enclosed is my check for a copy of One Man's Family Album, and a portion of a TOTAL boxtop because I "totally" enjoy your show. I also enjoy the *Nostalgia Digest* too, particularly



STILL MORE LETTERS

stories written by Curtis L. Katz (my talented son-in-law). —**KATHRYN T. SCIEZ**

CHICAGO— You get the most wonderful ideas! I have always wanted this One Man's Family Album. I have enclosed my check and a boxtop. You bet I'll be watching the mail, as in days gone by! —**SHIRLEY MORAN**

LIBERTYVILLE, IL— As someone who is "hooked" on One Man's Family, I would like to receive the copy of the Barbour Family Album which you mentioned on your show last Saturday. Unfortunately, I cannot enclose a boxtop from BACTINE since it no longer comes in a box (only sold in a plastic bottle). So, I'm enclosing a boxtop from another Miles Laboratories product, Alka-Seltzer. Thanks for making this material available. —**MARYLYN ALKIRE**

CHICAGO RIDGE, IL— Please send me the photocopy of the Barbour Family Album. Am anxious, after all these years (I listened to the original broadcasts) to see pictures of the cast. Somehow I missed that boxtop offer in 1951. —**C. HAUSER**

RIVER FOREST, IL— I grew up listening to One Man's Family and enjoyed it very much. I felt I knew the whole Barbour family. I can't believe I never sent for this album when it was originally offered — for ten cents! Thanks for the opportunity to refresh old memories. —**CAROL ZANKE**

DES PLAINES, IL— I wasn't around the first time One Man's Family aired, so I really have enjoyed listening these past few years to the rebroadcasts on the show and have gotten myself hooked on this soap opera (or should I say "Bactine opera"). Would you please send me a copy of the One Man's Family album. I have enclosed a check for \$5. I'm afraid Bactine boxtops are hard to find these days as the product comes in plastic bottles, so I have enclosed a Shake'n Bake boxtop instead. Maybe Mother Barbour would have used this product on

her chicken dinner on Sundays. —**NANCY LEJMAN**

(ED. NOTE)— Since the One Man's Family Album was offered on the 1951 shows we played last summer, and since we had a copy of the original, we thought we'd have some fun and offer a *photocopy* of the 20-page original for \$5 (\$3.50 plus tax and first class mail) and a boxtop —any boxtop! Lots of listeners responded. We still have some of the facsimile albums available. If you want one, send a check *and* a boxtop to Metro Golden Memories, 5425 W. Addison St., Chicago, IL 60641. Or, call 1-800-538-6675, use your Visa, Discover or MasterCard, and *describe* a boxtop!

NORTH RIVERSIDE, IL— I am sure you have heard this many times before. However, the Kowalczyk Family wants you to hear it again: you and your programs have given us much pleasure and entertainment. Our Saturdays are made warm and comforted almost as much by your cheery and sincere personality as by the programs you present in such good taste. We look forward to your programs. They warm us almost as much as the proverbial "fireplaces" and "logs on the fire" so often referred to in the Barbour family episodes. We bought our home in 1969 and I joined your loyal following the next year. And you have always been there helping me paint, wallpaper, put up the Christmas tree, etc. We frequent Metro Golden Memories often and have never met a nostalgia buff there that we didn't like. —**AL KOWALCZYK**

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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