

NOSTALGIA DIGEST

AND
RADIO
GUIDE



MATT CROWLEY
AS "BUCK ROGERS"

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CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-THREE

CHAPTER THREE

APRIL/MAY 1997

Hello, Out There in Radioland!

Every year since we've been on the air with our *Those Were The Days* program, we would get a call in mid-April.

"Where do you want me to bring the cake?" the caller asked.

The cake?

"C'mon, Chuck. You know what I'm talking about. Your Steinmetz High School Alumni Association wants to send you a cake in honor of your broadcast anniversary."

It was Charlie Roehl. He had been waving the flag for Steinmetz since he graduated back in 1936. He and his wife Lucile (class of '35) were very active members of the Alumni Association and huge supporters of the school.

Charlie was a tireless worker on behalf of Steinmetz. When the Alumni Association was founded in 1946, he became its sponsor. He was president in the mid-'50s, again in the mid '80s, and was active on the Board of Governors.

One day in 1970, he happened to hear me say on the air that I graduated from Steinmetz, class of June, 1952.

In April, 1971, he showed up at our broadcast studio with a huge cake offering congratulations on our first anniversary. It was from the Steinmetz Alumni Association.

"Don't mention my name," he said. "If you want to say something on the air, mention the Alumni Association and the name of the principal. And that the cake came from Jarosch Bakery in Elk Grove. Betty Jarosch graduated from Steinmetz!" With that, he rushed out the door.

That's the way it has been every April since. We'd get the call and Charlie would show up at the studio with a big cake, sometimes two or three big cakes.

A number of years ago he was wearing a Steinmetz jacket when he showed up with a cake. I admired the jacket and asked if it could be purchased at the school. "No," he said. And then he took the jacket off his back and gave it to me. I protested, but he wouldn't take no for an answer and he was gone like a flash --or maybe a Steinmetz Streak-- leaving me with another anniversary cake ...and a jacket that I still wear and treasure.

During the year --between cakes-- Charlie would keep in touch by sending me current issues of the *Steinmetz Star* and other clippings from and about the school.

Even in recent years, with his health failing, he would always call in mid-April and ask, "Where do you want me to bring the cake?"

Charlie Roehl delivered his last cake a year ago. He died on November 1st.

We will always remember his kindness, thoughtfulness and friendship. And his loyalty to our *alma mater* will not be forgotten and will never be surpassed.

Those of us who went to Steinmetz will always remember him.

He never failed to remind us to "keep bright the silver and the green."

And so we shall, my friend. Good-bye, Charlie.

--Chuck Schaden

Confessions of a Buck Rogers 25th Century Solar Scout

By ED KNAPP

"ZAP-ZAP" rang out from behind the hedge lining in our house. I had taken a bead with my nifty new 39 cent Buck Rogers Rocket Pistol. Mrs. Rowe's snowball bush was reduced to naked stems. The summer sun gleamed off the steel blue barrel of the rocket gun; taking aim at Mrs. Ruggles' wash line. "ZAP-ZAP;" again the weapon recoiled and the wash disappeared in a vapor cloud. I never had so much fun in my young life, ridding the world of unnecessary alien objects around the neighborhood.

I became a devoted fan of futuristic Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century; greatly stimulating my five tender years since his first appearance in the Sunday funnies, 1929. Buck Rogers stood alone in early science fiction comics, preceding Brick Bradford, Flash Gordon, and numerous other later day space adventurers. Buck was the first to bring my attention and fascination to the heretofore unnoticed universe surrounding the earth. Thereafter, my heart beat faster when I gazed up in wonder at the broad night skies filled with twinkling points of light. Adding Buck Rogers to this bewitching backdrop that hung majestic and mysterious above my house, made it a thrill of a lifetime. I became enthralled with artist Dick Calkins'

marvelous concept of Buck's world. What child of the early thirties could resist the excitement the comic figure evoked.

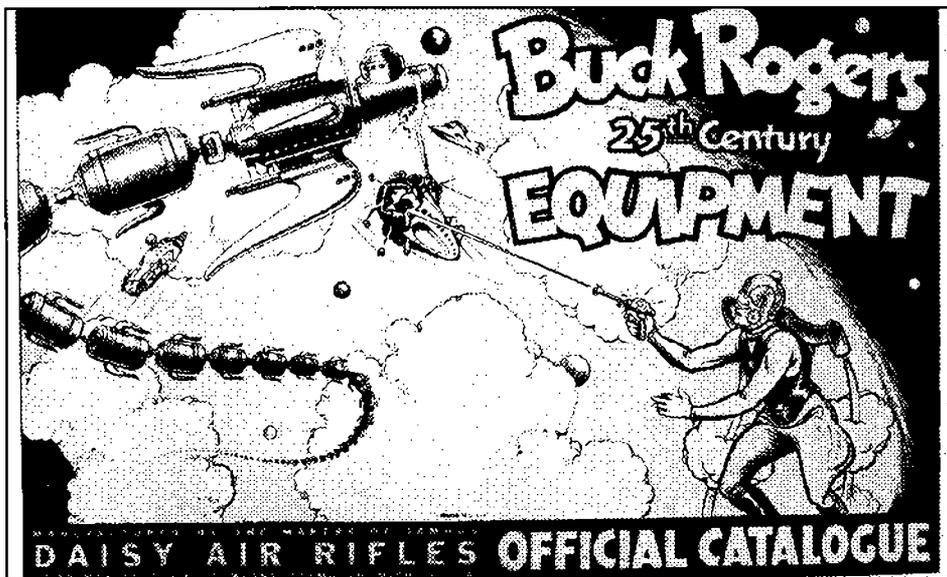
During those earlier years many mysteries and questions of the celestial bodies that have since been answered, were still shrouded in doubts. This was in a time before the invention or intercession in or world of rocket ships, space stations, satellites, close-up pictures of distant planets, high grade electronics, and long before earthlings set foot on the moon's surface.

My fascination with the 25th Century stories with Buck helmeted in tight fitting space cap and free flying above the buildings of the earth's capitol city of Niagra in a back pack "jumping belt," was mesmerizing.

I became further smitten with the Buck Rogers period when he came "alive" in a lineup of late afternoon adventure story programs carried on the radio. The spirit of that highly advanced era was graphically captured in the program's thrilling title opener. The announcer's voice reverberated dramatically from an echo chamber, proclaiming: **BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY!** booming forth, accompanied by the thunderous roar of a rocket ship blasting off in flight. The course to high adventure had been set with the tone of that opening.

As a typical young radio listener I was literally transported to mysterious interplanetary worlds with Buck and his companions every weekday; often rocketing to

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



Mars, Venus, Saturn, Jupiter among other distant planets in our galaxy. Buck's constant companions in his full blown imaginary flights into space (in comics and radio) were the brilliant scientist and master inventor, elderly Dr. Huer and lovely blonde Wilma Deering, Buck's close female helper in his celestial adventures. In fondly recalling the radio series, it seemed Wilma was forever getting herself into the most disastrous predicaments (like most girls) and it took all of Buck's resources to safely bail her out.

Like all true adventurers, Buck had his hands full, fighting evil adversaries that existed in the stellar system. None were more evil, cunning, and treacherous than his arch enemy, Killer Kane and his equally untrustworthy partner, Ardala. Ardala was dark haired, beautiful, shapely and vampish; possessing the deadly venom of a rattle snake.

This sinister pair were forever laying plans to eliminate Buck and his friends in a diabolical scheme to become dictatorial rulers of the entire universe. Buck Rogers' most valuable asset for good was eccen-

tric and wise Dr. Huer. The thin, bald headed scientist was perpetually running from test tube to test tube in some new experiment conducted in his amazing laboratory of gadgets.

Dr. Huer created many worthwhile devices and weapons to combat the evils perpetrated in outer space by Killer Kane and others of his kind. They were necessary defense mechanisms engineered by the smart doctor, aided by our hero in fighting the forces of many wicked planet inhabitants: the Tikekeman, Asterites, Mekkanos, fierce Tiger Men, or the evil "yellow" menace. Prolific inventions by Dr. Heuer included the Psychic Restriction Ray, Ultrasonic death rays, Teleradioscope, Molecular Expansor, Radio Television, and the Mechanical Mole (designed to burrow into the earth's core).

The tremendous bond that developed between Buck and myself during my childhood grew even stronger when the sponsor of his radio program began to offer captivating giveaway premiums to faithful listeners.

* Among the show's first premium offers

BUCK ROGERS

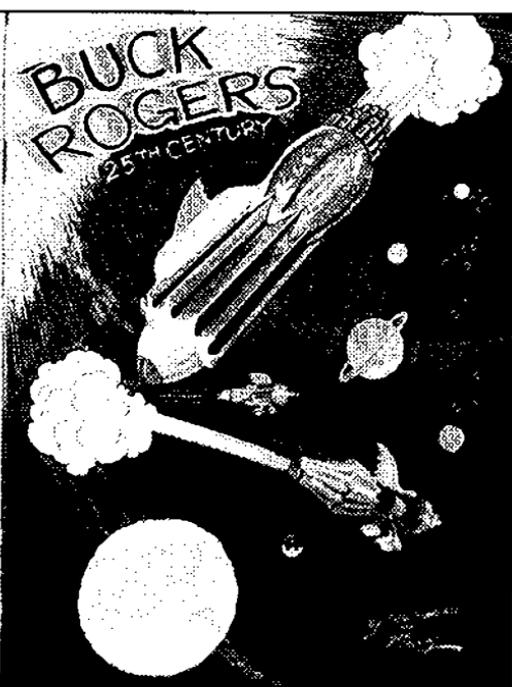
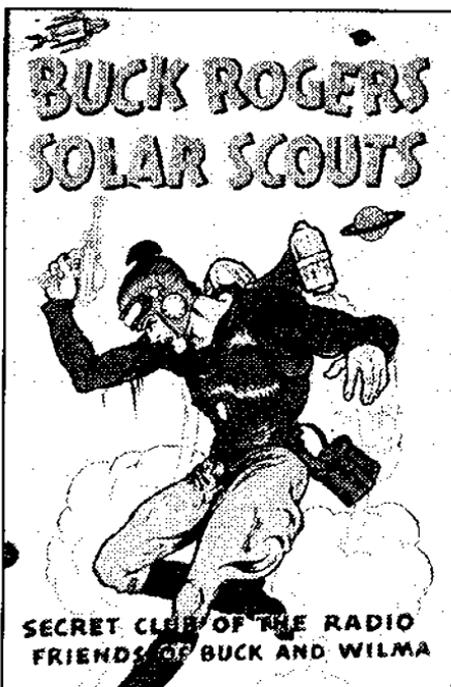
was a recruitment of young fans to join the Buck Rogers Solar Scouts and, for one boxtop, you were sent a striking silver badge to wear. The neat badge carried a deeply engraved portrait of Buck and the words, "Buck Rogers Solar Scouts." The Solar Scout members were enlisted by the thousands as a force for good, to foil the insidious Killer Kane and other evil doers; to save our earth from destruction and bring peace to our Galactic region.

From that time forward we official radio listening Solar Scouts rocketed with Buck to each new adventure, in a pact to help each other for the good of mankind and the heavens above us. Together we explored uncharted space bodies, new star Nebula fields, with a vow to preserve the astonishing universe. I was so proud to be a charter member of the Buck Rogers Solar Scouts that I always wore my shiny silver badge so all my friends would know

what I stood for.

The highly influential figure of Buck Rogers became even more important in my youth as I followed the colorful comic space adventures each Sunday and sustained my airwaves listening, while the radio sponsor offered more intriguing premiums. The box-top offers reinforced my dedication to work in our Solar Scouts group.

Among other 25th Century paraphernalia Buck Rogers' radio sponsor offered were: a secret Solar Scout manual, a paper rocket pistol (with a realistic "pop"), model rocket ships, a "Chief Explorers" badge, a large full color map of the solar system (enabling me to closely follow Buck's rocket travels to distant points in the Galaxies), a pocket knife shaped like a space ship, a book of stand-up cut out figures of all principal characters heard on the program, and a super secret Buck Rogers Repeller Ray ring (one size fits all). I sent for and received so many of the radio pro-





BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY

The early radio cast (from left): Curtis Arnall as Buck; Elaine Melchoir as Ardala; William Shelley as Killer Kane; Edgar Stehli as Dr. Huer; Adele Ronson as Wilma.

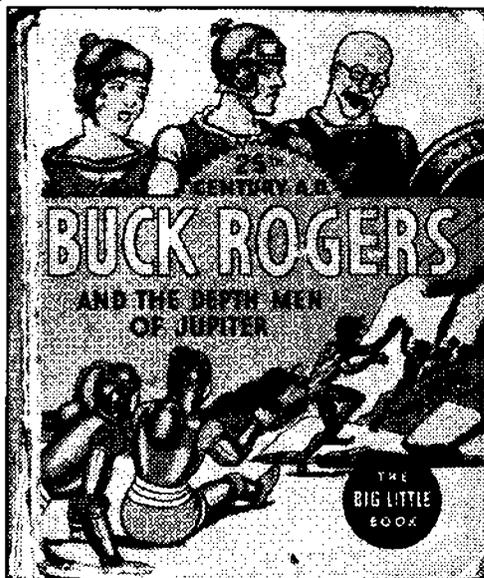
gram premiums during the program's existence, I almost began to believe I was already a part of the 25th century world.

Because of the increasing popularity of Buck Rogers among 1930s youth, the Five and Dime and department stores stocked a large and varied assortment of Buck Rogers endorsed merchandise. One really had to see the volume to believe it. So extensive and all encompass-

ing was the exciting Buck Rogers product, needless to report, my enthusiasm for the

era grew nothing short of explosive.

The store shelves were stocked with such alluring items as space suits, pencil boxes and tablets, games, flying belts, rubber stamp sets, watches, disintegrator ray guns, lab sets, coloring books, Big Little Books, bubble gum with cards—all with the bold, colorful image of



BUCK ROGERS

my outer space hero, Buck Rogers. The thrill created over Buck's adventures and co-supporting merchandise can be fully realized when you read some of the titles in his series of ten Big Little Books: *Buck Rogers and the Doomed Comet*; *The Moons of Saturn*; *The City Below the Sea*; *The Depth Men of Jupiter*; *The Fiend from Space*. The excitement was unending.

Such was Buck's appeal that in 1939 Universal Studios produced a weekly 12-chapter serial of "Buck Rogers." It was a great success with the young Saturday afternoon movie matinee crowd. Larry "Buster" Crabbe, already my hero as Tarzan and Flash Gordon in earlier 1930s movie serials, played the invincible Buck Rogers in the 25th Century. By this time, we children of the pre-TV days were fed on a full diet of our hero that nourished our appetite for adventure through the comics, radio, hard cover books, ten cent com-

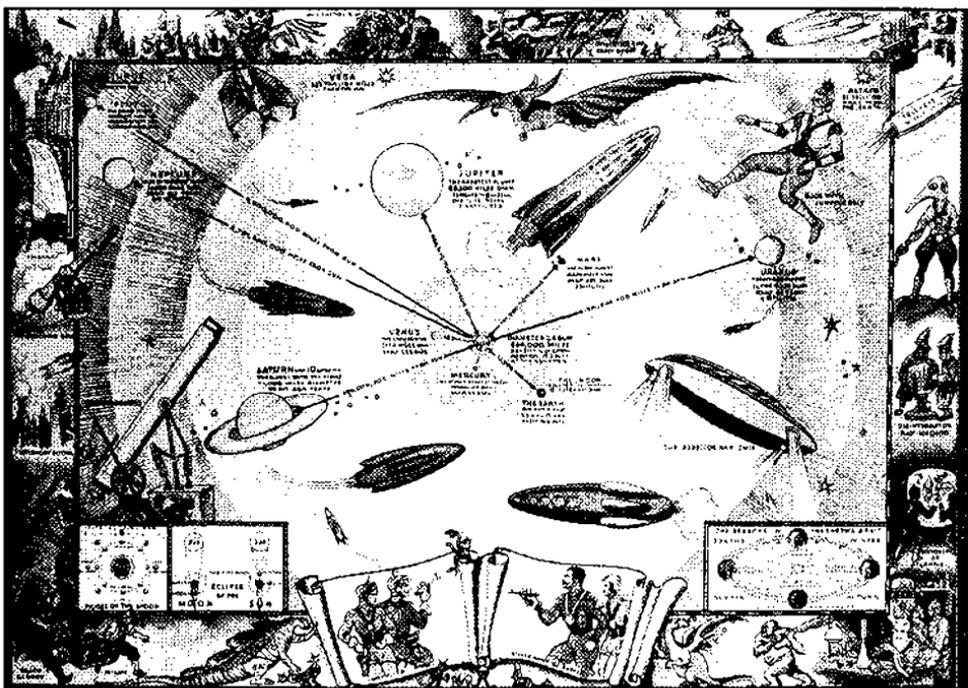
ics, the Big Little Books, the movies, and assorted merchandise.

Today you seldom, if ever, hear the name of Buck Rogers cross anybody's lips, or see his name in print. However, Buck Rogers was "it" in his day, the decade of the thirties.

I was most proud to have been a member of Buck's Solar Scouts team and obviously our group was successful in our combined efforts to save the universe. Should you ask for proof, you only have to step outside your house on a clear night, look up to the vast black dome filled with twinkling starlight. The majestic canopy there reaching above you endlessly, attests to our success in preserving the celestial heavens for you to savor and enjoy for all time.

This, then, is my true confession as a Buck Rogers 25th Century Solar Scout; a testimony of faith and goodwill. ■

NOTE—Tune in to Those Were The Days Saturday, May 24 for an origin episode of "Buck Rogers."



'Turn on the Squeak Box And Wait for the Parlor Spray'

By RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

What is a *radioslaytion*?

In the old days, that is what they used to call a radio station that did a poor job of transmitting its signal. Even today, we still have too many *radioslaytions* around.

But how about *radioite*? That's another way of saying you are a radio buff. *Radiatoration* is a speech delivered over the airwaves, and *radiatorator* is the speaker who delivers it. And you have *radioitis*, if you turn on your radio, and leave it going all day.

Modern radio workers, and radio fans, as well, may have their own slang, but the language used during the early years of the industry was far more interesting, and a lot more fun.

Let's test your memory, and see how much vintage radio lingo you can recall. We'll warm-up with some easy ones. For example, what was *airways*? That's the same as *airwaves*, or radio broadcasting.

How about *canned music*? Before CDs and cassettes came along, that is what they used to call music on records. *Platters* meant the same thing. *Disc* was also an-

other name for a phonograph record. *Disc jockeys* used to play them all the time.

For the record -- no pun intended -- *canned speech* was a talk recorded on a *disc*, in advance of the broadcast. Religious programs often took advantage of *canned speech*, because, in many cases, they were unable to find permanent spots on the Sunday morning radio schedules, which were jammed with religious programs. The programs came on at different times in different cities.

Continuity was all that talk you heard between musical numbers, whether popular or classical. It was a bridge between the selections. A *waxed library* was where they kept all those *platters*.

Web was a radio network. *Warbler* was a popular singer, usually male. *Warbler* fans all across the land could not see their favorite's face, so they conjured up their own magnificent images, only to have them crushed when they came across a photograph of the singer. Many a popular *warbler* would never make it on television.

Unwind the stanza was a soap opera term. It meant to complete a week of shows.

What was *timecasting*? That was when the announcer came on between shows, at the half-hour on the hour, and gave the correct time, right down to the exact second. *Tub-thumping* was advertising over the air. *Tom-toming* meant the same thing. So did *blurbing*, *drum beating*, *ether bally* and *hullabaloo*.

Richard W. O'Donnell of Port Richey, Florida is a long-time radio buff who loves to talk, write and listen. He's married with five adult children who went to bed at night listening to the old radio shows, and always got a pleasant night's sleep. He's been a free-lance writer for over 25 years and will be a regular contributor to the Nostalgia Digest.

RADIO SLANG

What was *paycheck*? That was the advertiser who paid for all that *ether bally* you heard over the *airways*.

A *newscaster* was the announcer who read the news. An *air spellbinder* was an effective announcer, or speaker. A *blaster* was a radio broadcaster. So was an *etherer*, *mikester*, *sound tosser*, and *word slinger*.

Rettysnitch was a mythical instrument of torture that was supposed to be used on performers who made obvious goofs during a live broadcast. And since most shows were live back then, it is a good thing those *rettysnitches* were strictly mythical.

Remote was a broadcast away from the station. Remember the big bands? *Mike* was short for microphone. *Hit the air* meant to broadcast by radio. *Mat stint* was an afternoon program, or assignment. *Miketivity* was the fine art of radio broadcasting. A *musical tab* was a short musical program, or interlude. *N.G.* meant a terrible program. That's short for *no good*, as you may have guessed.

On the air meant a station was in operation. *On*, all by itself, was a shorter version of the same expression. What was *parlor spray*? That is what they used to call radio programs in general.

How about *programmer*? That was the director of radio programs at a station. *Radiotics* were anecdotes about radio. *The gang* was what they called all "the members of the radio brotherhood." A *tunesmith* was a composer of tunes. No mystery

about that one. But how about *tunesmithing*? That was singing a song composed by the *tunesmith*.

Let's have a quiz. Ten examples of radio slang follow. Let's see how many you recognize:

1. *wobble*
2. *adenoidal*
3. *beard*
4. *bootleg*
5. *land the nod*
6. *mike hugger*
7. *squeak box*
8. *crime club airing*
9. *easy on the ears*
10. *ether links*

Here are the meanings:

1. Unsteady radio signals
2. Poor radio voice
3. A mumblor on a radio show
4. An unlicensed station
5. To get a job in broadcasting
6. Excited performer who grabs hold of microphone
7. Another name for the parlor radio
8. A mystery or police show
9. Pleasant listening
10. A radio network

Bet you can't get this one. What was *local galli-curcia*? It was one of those amateur shows that were all over the air during radio's early years.

And finally, how about *sign-off*? That meant you were almost out of time. The moment had arrived to give your signature farewell, and get off the airwaves. Simply stated, the time had come to shut up. ■

RADIO SLANG Bibliography

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From Cathedral to Automotive... ...Do Today's Radios Have Soul?

By W. GARDNER KISSACK

Were you among the first to notice how the design and shape of radios—especially the older table models and portables—reflected society's interests, fads, or icons, and borrowed styling cues from other design areas?

The classic "cathedral" radios of the 1930s (inspired by the then popular/prominent religious programs), with their graceful, Gothic wooden arches or flying buttresses protecting the soft fabric threads of grill cloth and the speaker itself, were but an avant garde harbinger of radio design(s) for the decades that followed.

Once the "breadboards" and separate speakers of the '20s were integrated, and after plastics were introduced and perfected (the soft plastics warped and melted (the soft Bakelite and Catalin became the enduring plastics of the '40s and '50s and alter), radio design became dramatically more interesting, varied, personal and significant for a period of some thirty years, a time approximating the Golden Age of Radio.

The varied radio designs, whether based on automotive influences (prominent radiator grills or sweeping dashboards or

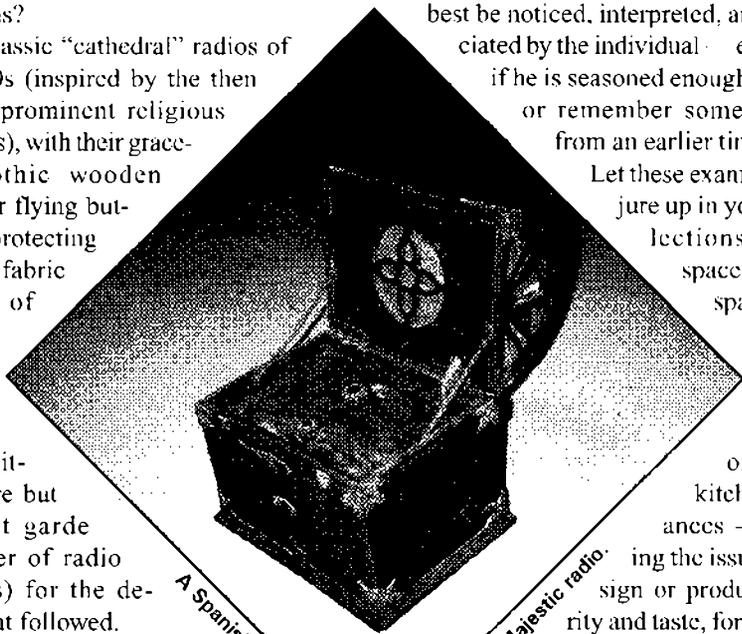
speedometers with an attitude) or aircraft details (propellers or rakish swept-wings/fins or thrusting jet engine pods) or reflecting pre-World War II Art Deco trends or postwar Danish Modern simplicity, can best be noticed, interpreted, and appreciated by the individual—especially if he is seasoned enough to recall or remember some designs from an earlier time.

Let these examples conjure up in your recollections, then, space helmets, space ships, cockpits, split-level houses, or even kitchen appliances—ignoring

the issues of design or product integrity and taste, for those are far beyond the scope of this simple reflection. (It is better to have kitsched and lost than never to have kitsched at all!). Were we supposed to be reminded then, as we looked at or tuned a radio, of the thrill of driving a motor car, the wonder of flying, the lure of a new refrigerator, what?

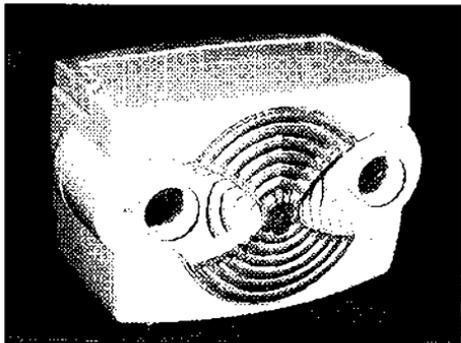
The somber dark, formal wood and brown plastic radios of the '30s, and even the '40s, gave way after the war to flights of design fancy in the 1950s.

(This is not to ignore the whimsical and even colorful designs of the '30s and '40s

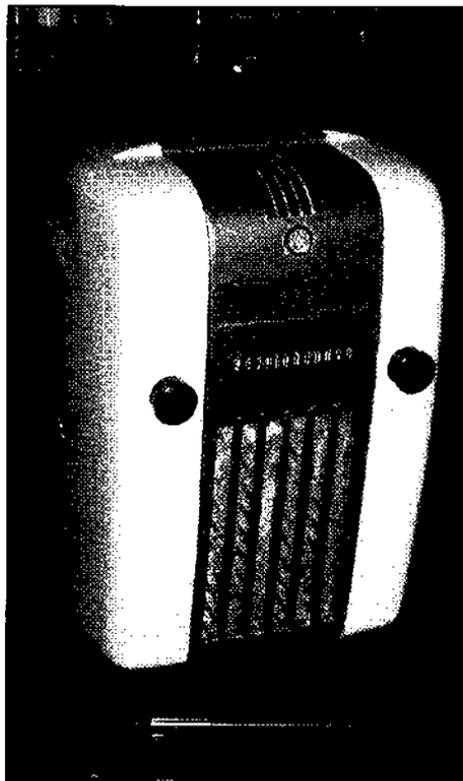


A Spanish treasure chest?

Nope. A 1933 Majestic radio.



A 1953 Zenith Owl



"What's for lunch, Betty Furness?"
A 1946-48 Westinghouse, you can be sure.

which often featured bold or beautiful marbled plastics, or specialty radios with miniature Charlie McCarthy, Lone Ranger or Hopalong Cassidy figures or pictures.)

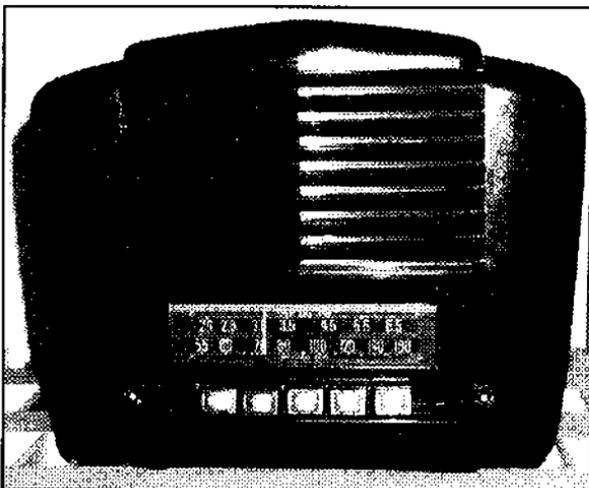
The country had come through the Depression, won a world war, elected its new leadership, and was celebrating in many ways.

During the '50s, color was everywhere: cars were commonly two- and three-toned by mid-decade; home appliances came in a rainbow of colors, as did window awnings and shutters. Plastics were now commonly one color all the way through the plastic, not merely painted, and radios ran the color gamut: Chinese red, burnt or-

ange, marbled mauve. California avocado (aka 1950 Ford Crestliner chartreuse),

Cherokee red, coral pink (that perfectly matched the 1953 Ford Victoria coral), and many greens, ranging from soft, mint pastel through kelly to hunter.

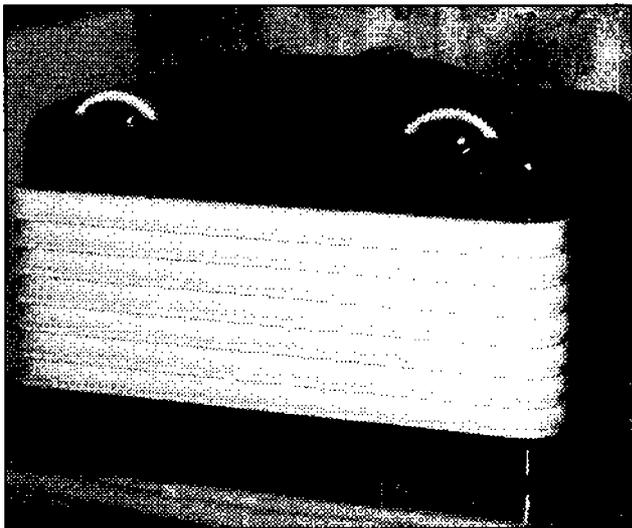
There were some beige radios, a few grays, and, aside from an occasional powder blue or Easter-egg aqua, practically no darker blue radios. A surprising number of sets featured bright silvery or anodized gold metallic trim speaker grilles — some in a slashing, modernistic V shape. V as in V-8. Really. A few radios were clad in spirited tartan plaid(s) and some por-



Not the front of a Chrysler or Crosley automobile, but of a late 30s to early 40s Crosley radio

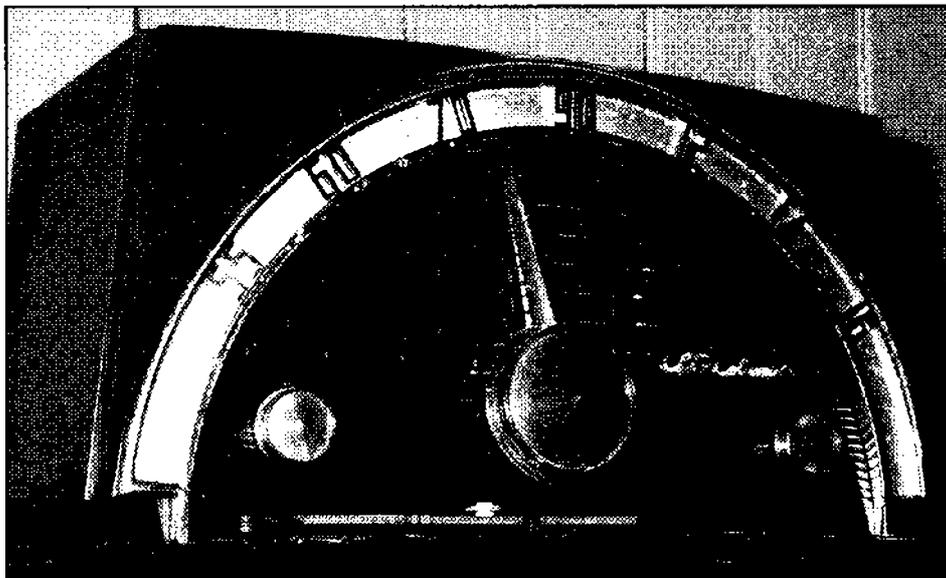
tables lived in luggage-like faux alligator grain cases or snake/lizardy-looking appliques. The less said about these latter two, the better.

There were dozens of companies manufacturing many hundreds of different radio designs amounting to thousands of individual models over the years. Some of the major players in the United States, noted for their designs and innovations, were Crosley, Philco, Emerson, Sparton, Zanith, Arvin, Bendix, RCA, Westinghouse, Motorola, Majestic, GE, Stewart-Warner, Admiral, and, of course, Atwater Kent. Many of their models, certainly not most, have survived damp basements, dry attics, cold garages, use, misuse, abuse, and yard sales. And they do *not* have to work (or play) to be appreciated today.

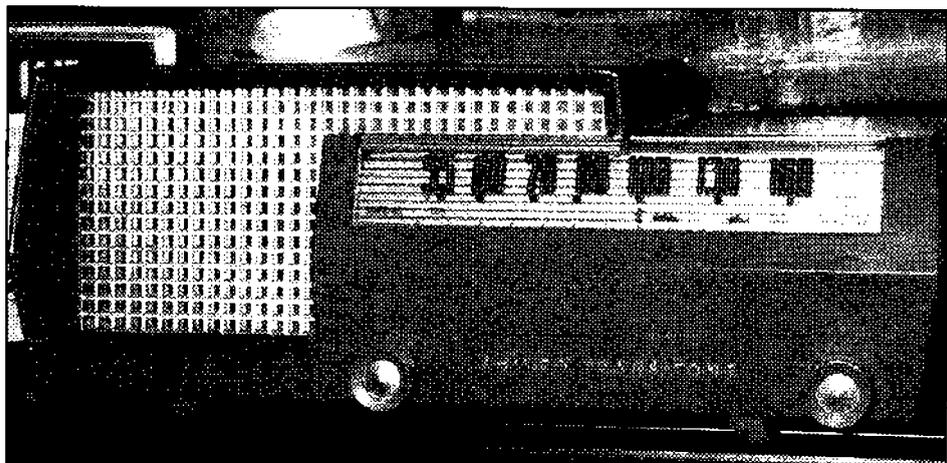


A 1950 Setchell-Carlson, with inverted tubes.

As radio receiver technology improved, the need for original, daring or stylish packaging decreased. There is little doubt that today's radios play better, longer, louder (oh, yes), more clearly (for the most part), and are more sophisticated and durable than radios of yesterday, and no less should be expected, given the nature of technol-



A 1953 CBS (Could Be Speeding) Columbia. "Is that MPH or KPH, Officer...?"



1953 Philco Transitone. Or is this one of those new split-levels?

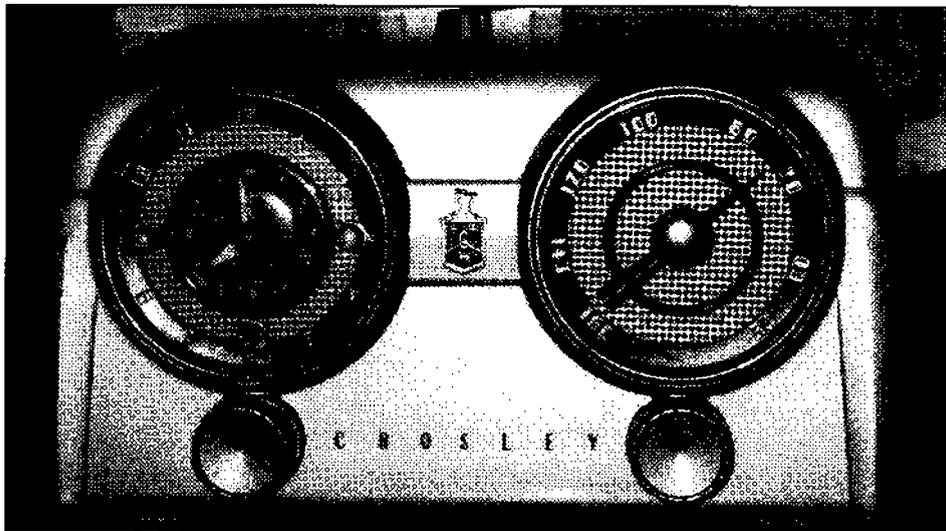
ogy, technology being what it is. The modern product may be technically superior, but the package is vastly different.

And what of radio design in the '90s? For an answer, you need only check your Sunday newspaper ad inserts from K-Mart, Target, Venture, Kohl's, Marshall Field's, Wards, Sears, or JC Penney. Or, better yet, go to one of these stores and see for yourself. The design of the '90s appears to be — what? — a so-called Post-Modern Func-

tionalism, for a lack of a better description.

Does it make a difference that there is little character and no style, only splendid performance? We'll see. This much we know: something was gained ...and something was lost. ■

W Gardner Kissack is a volunteer tour guide for the Museum of Broadcast Communications and a collector of old radios.



1953 Crosley. "Where's the steering wheel in this thing?"

*Ken Alexander
Remembers . . .*

Austin High



When we reach a certain age, we like to think about the past. Folks who went to college reminisce about their college days, the days of innocence and youth, the care-free days, the salad days.

Being a child of the Great Depression, I — like many of my contemporaries — never went to college; upon graduation from high school, we went directly to work full-time. Although we have no college days to look back on, we do have high school memories, and I have a store of recollections of my four years at Austin High.

By rights, I shouldn't have attended Austin: My family lived in the Marshall High School district, which was east of Austin. Although Marshall and Austin were both fine schools, my parents decided that I should go to Austin, and they obtained a permit from the Austin district superintendent, allowing me to enroll at Austin. It was January 1943.

Austin was one of the largest high schools in Chicago, with an enrollment of 5700. The school was especially well known for its athletic department and its music program. In the latter there was a concert orchestra as well as a girls' band, a boys' band, three mixed choirs — junior, intermediate and senior — and a girls' glee.

Situated on the far West Side, two blocks

from Central Avenue and Lake Street, the physical plant at Austin was among the best in the city. The school comprised two buildings: the East Building, a three-story red brick structure which faced on Long Avenue, and the newer, West building, four stories tall, of yellow brick, facing Pine Avenue.

Between the two buildings was a campus, a grassy area with shrubs and trees and benches. Two paths crossed the campus diagonally from one building to the other. This campus gave the school an atmosphere resembling that of a small college. In pleasant weather, students who brought their lunch from home would spend their lunch periods on the campus.

Because the classrooms were not air conditioned, the windows were often open in warm weather, and at times the sound of one of the choirs in rehearsal would waft out over the campus.

There was a five-minute break between class periods to give the students time to move from one classroom to another. If, as sometimes happened, a student had to go from the third floor of the East Building across the campus to the fourth floor of the West Building, he or she would just about make it.

The main auditorium, in the West Building, boasted the best-equipped stage of all

AUSTIN HIGH

Chicago high schools, the lighting, the sound system, the curtains and the backdrops being worthy of a commercial theatre downtown. Rockwood Hall, as the auditorium was called (named for an earlier principal of the school), held 2,485 seats.

Maroon and white were the Austin school colors, and many of the students owned Austin sweaters — maroon with white trim, or white with maroon trim — which were available in both slipover and cardigan styles.

The uniforms of the boys' and girls' bands were maroon with white trim. The school's yearbook — "The Annual," as we called it — was officially the "Maroon and White."

On some Friday evenings during the school year, a dance would be held in the boys' gym in the West Building. These dances were called "socials," and the students who attended would dress up for the occasion: sport jackets and ties for the boys; skirts and sweaters and heels for the girls.

Music would be provided by a band composed of students, who would regale the crowd with the tunes of the day such as "To Each His Own" and "Boogie Woogie" and evergreens such as "Stardust."

These socials were enjoyable evenings even for a kid like me who didn't dance; they were an opportunity for a large group of students to mingle in a relaxed social setting, rather than in a classroom situation.

A Chicago policeman known to the stu-

dents as Pat the Cop had Austin High School as his beat. Pat was a tall, beefy man of Irish descent with silver hair and a ruddy face. He was always on foot when we saw him, traversing the streets around the school.

Pat's main concern, it seems, was truancy. He knew when the first period of the day began and when the school day ended. He also knew the times when the lunch periods occurred, and when he spied a teen roaming the streets when classes were in session, he would shag the kid back to school.

'The offending student had to report to Room 105 at 8 a.m. and remain there until 8:40.'

The Green Grill was a store situated just across the street from the school where one could buy school supplies. The Grill also served coffee and sandwiches and ice cream creations. Often, a couple of students would go to the Grill for lunch and linger after the lunch period ended. Likely as not, Pat the Cop would enter and see the kids lounging in a booth sipping Cokes. Back to the school he would escort them.

Legend has it that when Pat was younger, he had been able to outrun kids on the street. As he aged, he slowed down somewhat, but he still was able to nab the truants. If a kid tried to flee, Pat would throw his billy club in such a way that it would catch the kid between the ankles and trip him up. Before the hapless truant could get to his feet, Pat would be upon him and have him in custody.

Although there were very few serious disciplinary problems at Austin, there were a number of minor ones — and they did not go unpunished. If a student came late to class or failed to have his or her assign-

ment ready on time, or was found guilty of some other such transgression, the standard penalty was the eight-o'clock.

The punishment might be one eight-o'clock, or two, or five, or even more — depending upon the seriousness of the offense as well as the mood of the teacher on that particular day.

To receive an eight-o'clock meant that the offending student had to report to Room 105 — the Little Theatre, an auditorium of about 200 seats — at 8 a.m. and remain there until 8:40, when the first classes began.

A teacher was assigned to preside over Room 105 during this time, and this teacher ran a tight ship. At 8:00 straight up he would close the door to the room, and if a student tried to enter after that door shut, he or she would be denied admission and told to report again the following morning.

Each student in the room would be given a pink slip, which the student would later present to the teacher who had assigned the eight-o'clock, as proof that he or she had served the time.

While making up the eight-o'clock, the students could study or simply sit in their seats. But they were not allowed to talk. If the presiding teacher heard a whisper, the offender would be forced to surrender his or her pink slip and make up the eight-o'clock another day.

You could hear the clock tick in Room 105 from 8:00 to 8:40 a.m.

There were no gangs at Austin when I was going to school; however, there had been a gang some 20 years before. The Austin High Gang was a musical gang,

several boys who got together to play at school dances and other gigs around the area. Some of these kids later became legends in the world of jazz.

The group included Bud Freeman on sax, Jimmy McPartland on cornet and trumpet, his brother Dick on guitar, Frank Teschmacher on clarinet, Jim Lanigan on bass, and Dave Tough (from Oak Park High School) on drums.

Benny Goodman, who attended Harrison High, knew the boys and sometimes played with them, although he was not a regular member of the group.

Another famous Austin alumnus was Bill DeCorrevont, perhaps the most celebrated high school athlete of all time. DeCorrevont had performed with brilliance as tailback on Austin's football team in the late '30s.

Upon graduation, he enrolled at Northwestern University, where he played with the football Wildcats and — all round athlete that he was — also played on Northwestern's baseball team.

DeCorrevont served in the navy during

the war, and afterward played with the Chicago Cardinals and a couple of other NFL teams, but his amazing performance at Austin High was not soon forgotten. As a student in the mid-'40s, if I happened to tell a stranger what school I attended,

likely as not the stranger's eyes would light up as he recalled the name of Bill DeCorrevont and the famous Austin football team of a half-dozen years before.

As a result of a couple of circumstances, I was about a year younger than most of my classmates, and although I was their

'In the half-century that has passed, never once have I found myself wishing that I were able to do algebra.'

AUSTIN HIGH

intellectual equal, I lagged behind them in physical and emotional development. I was also extremely shy. These factors combined to make the adjustment to the high school routine difficult for me.

During my freshman and sophomore years, some of my grades were nothing to be proud of. Although I did well in English and French, which I enjoyed, algebra was one subject which I simply did not understand. Most of the girls and boys in my class had no trouble grasping the concepts, but I just didn't get it. I failed the course.

Not that I'm any the worse for it. In the half-century that has passed since then, never once have I found myself wishing that I were able to do algebra.

Of all the courses in high school, my most formidable bugbear was physical education.

Scrawny lad that I was, I possessed no athletic ability whatsoever. Whenever the captains chose up sides for their teams, I was sure to be their last pick.

Not that I minded. I had no interest in being an athlete. Learning to climb a pole like a squirrel, broad jump like a kangaroo, clear a hurdle like a horse, swim like a trout, swing from a rope like a monkey — what, I wondered, did this have to do with education?

I mean no offense to gym instructors — I'm sure that physical education is an important part of any high school curriculum — but every student has his or her least-favorite subject, and mine just happened

to be physical ed.

In my senior year, I failed to receive a passing grade in physical education. My peers had a lot of fun with that one: "How could anyone possibly *flunk gym*?"

Physical education was a minor subject; nevertheless, a certain number of minor credits were required for graduation, and I lacked that one credit. By rights, I never should have graduated.

My being younger than my classmates, plus my naivete and shyness, made me an ideal candidate for teasing by a few of the boys in my division. These boys didn't dislike me, but they did delight in embarrassing me. And while I tried to conceal my discomfiture, internally I was miserable much of the time.

That changed dramatically toward the end of my junior year. The annual Hallowe'en show put on by the Austin Student Government was coming up, and I — probably the quietest, most reserved, most bashful boy in the school — tried out for a part in the show. I would open the show by stepping in front of the curtain and do-

'I -- probably the quietest, most reserved, bashful boy in the school -- tried out for a part in the show.'

ing a brief comic monolog in a voice like that of "Inner Sanctum's" host, Raymond. Before the second act, I'd come out and do another short monolog.

I won the audition, and soon the rehearsals began — what fun! Then

came Hallowe'en and the show itself. On the stage of Rockwood Hall, with 2,000-plus students and teachers out front, I made my entrance.

I had wrapped myself in a white sheet, and I had rubbed corn starch onto my hands and face and into my hair — I was ghostly

white. To enhance the effect, the boys in the projection booth put a green spotlight on me.

My contribution to the show was well-received, and from then on it seems that I took part in every school show that was given. I did impersonations and standup comedy; I served as toastmaster at school banquets; I introduced musical numbers at concerts.

The editor of the school newspaper, The Austin Times, asked me to write a regular humor column for the paper, and I did.

There was no great talent involved on my part, but the kids seemed to enjoy what I did, and I had a wonderful time doing it. I also made a lot of friends.

One might think that with all the time I had to devote to these extracurricular activities, my grades would have suffered. However, just the opposite happened: My grades improved remarkably. It seems that as I became involved in those activities, my interest in my studies intensified. During my senior year I was on the super honor roll, with straight Ss.

My life had turned around — and all as a result of my having tried out for the Hallowe'en show. My senior year at Austin was a ball. The moth had emerged from its cocoon.

Graduation came in January 1947, and it was with some sadness that I left — so great was my affection for Austin High, and for the students and teachers who made it the fine institution that it was.

In the 1960s I paid a visit to Austin High and was surprised and greatly dismayed to find the East Building gone in its place

was a parking lot full of cars. I never returned.

My graduating class — as far as I know — has never had a reunion. In 1977, the class of '47 had a reunion and invited me, though I was from the class of '46 1/2.

I attended the reunion, and there I met a few people I remembered from school and

a few who remembered me, but the evening was not a memorable one, not at all what I thought it would be like.

Sometimes, rather than trying to recapture an earlier time, it's better to be content with the memories; better to remember things as

they were than to see how they've changed.

One of the happiest times of my life was my senior year at Austin High, and I was fortunate to realize at the time how happy I was.

I can recall a special moment from that happiest of years: One day, as I rushed through the crowded corridors from one class to another, saying hi to friends as I passed them in the hall, I thought of the activities — curricular and extracurricular — that lay ahead that afternoon and evening. And I remember thinking, "What a happy time this is! This must be the happiest time of my life."

There have been other happy times since then. But when it comes to happiness, as I look back across the years, I think it would be hard to top my senior year at Austin High. ■

NOTE-- Ken Alexander, the famous Austin High graduate, can be heard regularly on Those Were The Days as writer and star of the Mighty Metro Art Players.

***'Sometimes it's
better to be content
to remember things
as they were than
to see how they've
changed.'***



OUR READERS WRITE

WE GET LETTERS

HIGHLAND, INDIANA — I so enjoy our Saturday afternoons with you and all the old shows I grew up with. As long as I keep every radio in the house tuned to WNIB, I can do anything, clean anything, sew anything, wash anything, iron, etc. and still enjoy the radio and keep moving. Television chains you to a chair, but radio frees you up. I even put my Walkman on and do my three mile walk and never miss a word of your show. Thank you so much for being, and for my *Nostalgia Digest*. — **IRENE CALVIN**

BELOIT, WISCONSIN — Does anyone remember seeing large horses being used to plow snow off sidewalks? I do! About 1931. It was in Madison, Wisconsin. A man would walk behind a beautiful, blanketed horse and they would plow sidewalks early in the morning until whenever. Us kids, if we were lucky, would look forward to a snowfall, 'cause we knew we'd have a slight chance of seeing the horse and man come by and we might be able to give the horse an apple or carrot (which we would get out of our fruit cellars). Oh, what beautiful horses they were: large, hairy, with a bright red blanket over his back. Those were the good old days, for sure. — **PHYLLIS M. ANDERSON**

HOFFMAN ESTATES, IL — After a rather extended stay in Brazil, I have returned to the "land of ice and snow." What is life without Old Time Radio and the *Nostalgia Digest*? Brazil was wonderful, we have many friends down there, the sun is warm, the food — wonderful, warm and friendly people, — BUT, there "ain't" no old time radio. Old time radio was the only thing I missed of the Chicago area. I knew we'd be back, but it's the Saturdays up here that were missed. — **ED COOK**

WEST CHICAGO, IL — We are still listening as much as we can to *Those Were The Days* on Saturdays. We have three radios going, one in the kitchen, the living room and den. Almost like having surround sound. It's so good to hear all those old timers "like us"

who are still the greatest. When we heard Danny Kaye on the Lux Radio Theatre, it brought back memories of the days Carolyn and I, along with the Prairie Ramblers, were working our early morning shows on ABC-TV and occasionally go over to Don McNeill's Breakfast Club to do a guest shot. One morning Danny Kaye was also a guest on the show and we never stopped laughing as long as he was on. Danny sang a song that none of us were prepared for. He sang one half tone flat from the band and Eddie Ballantine signalled the band to lower the key, which they did. At this point Danny lowered his part. It was unbelievable. We all figured this was a part of his stage routine, but had no idea how anyone could do such a thing. Even the band was mystified.

I remember Phil Harris from the days when I was a kid and my school chum had an older brother who was a friend of Phil Harris. Phil would come out to my friend's farm on some weekends and spend time there. He loved the farm cooking, according to my friend's brother. As I remember him, he was very handsome and a personality-plus type of guy, always joking and laughing. He would play his ukulele and do a few tunes for us.

Chuck, keep up the good work on *TWTD*. It makes so many people like us very happy. I thought for some time it was just for the older folks, but found out that everyone regardless of age just loves it. Our son and his sons all really enjoy the show. Our oldest grandson remarked, "I never knew there were so many good shows on back in those days." — **CAROLYN DE ZURIK GILL AND RUSTY GILL**

(ED. NOTE) — It's nice to hear from our radio friends. Carolyn was one of the DeZurik Sisters and Rusty was one of the famous Prairie Ramblers on WLS and the National Barn Dance for many years. The next issue of our *Nostalgia Digest* will feature an article about the DeZurik Sisters.)

CHICAGO — Another fine article from Ken Alexander, this time "Movies in the Loop" (Feb/Mar, 1997). If I set my mind I can feel

the warmth of the marquee light bulbs, the glorious sounds from doorways, and the belching (pun intended) aromas from buttered popcorn and fried onions on the grill! Something unique about the Clark Theatre was the "Little Gallery" set aside for unescorted ladies. I spent many good times at "Hark! Hark! the Clark!" as well as the great jazz club The Blue Note, just a few doors away. Now, Ken, we need another fine article remembering the newspaper columnists that had the Loop as their beat. See ya at Fritzels? — **JIM L. CLARK**

THREE RIVERS, MICHIGAN — I always enjoy Ken Alexander's "look-back" articles, especially his most informative and interesting "Movies in the Loop" recollection. I never lived in Chicago, so I am not able to relate in the same perspective as Ken, but I did spend some of my summer there in 1935. I recall my mother taking me to some of the Loop movie theatres that included "in person" star-studded stage shows. It runs in my memory that summer that I saw on stage such stars as Laurel and Hardy, Burns and Allen and Paul Lucas (starring that summer in RKO's "The Three Musketeers"). Quite an experience for a small-town boy.

On another star-filled occasion, as a teen, I was driven to the Windy City on October 24, 1940 for the Hollywood-type premiere of director Cecil B. DeMille's feature "Northwest Mounted Police" being held simultaneously at the Chicago and State-Lake movie theatres on State Street. All the major stars of the Technicolor production appeared in person from a star walk-across bridge built between each theatre, blocking off State Street to traffic. One by one on that rainy evening the movie stars crossed over the bridge and greeted the clamoring crowds gathered there. The occasion was a true movie fan's dream come true. I saw Gary Cooper, Preston Foster, Madeleine Carroll, Paulette Goddard, Robert Preston, and Lynne Overman. — **ED KNAPP**
(ED. NOTE— Ed Knapp is a frequent contributor to the *Digest* editorial pages. His article about Buck Rogers is this issue's cover story.)

KOKOMO, INDIANA — In the Metro Golden Memories catalog supplement in the February-March issue of the *Nostalgia Digest*, there is a tape cassette set (on page

S-4) called "Day from the Golden Age of Radio" that interests me. In 1939 I was an engineer with WJSV in Washington, D.C. and was the studio engineer for the Arthur Godfrey "Sunrise" program. And in the afternoon I did the baseball game between the Washington Senators and the Cleveland Indians. It sure brought back memories to me. I'm glad to see that that day was preserved for posterity. — **RUSS RENNAKER**

KENOSHA, WISCONSIN — Now that this is a new year I hope you and Stan Freberg have made new year resolutions to put the Cinnamon Bear tapes to rest (for good). My fiancée and I are older than you Chuck and neither one of us remember the program. As for Carlton E. Morse... we can tolerate One Man's Family and I Love A Mystery, but The Cobra King Strikes Back? Really, Chuck... and ten episodes in a row, yet! You might as well go for broke and play ten consecutive episodes of Jack Armstrong, Little Orphan Annie or Terry and the Pirates. We enjoy going back and reliving those days but not that far back. Let's have more Fibber McGee, Jack Benny, Mr. District Attorney, Hermit's Cave, Johnny Dollar, Our Miss Brooks, Gildersleeve, Casey, Crime Photographer. Get the picture? There, I said it and I'm glad. Regardless, we both love ya. Keep pluggin'. — **CARL A. BUTERA**
(ED. NOTE — You gave us a good idea. Tune in *Those Were The Days* on May 31st for ten consecutive episodes of Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy!)

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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Chuck Schaden's
THOSE WERE THE DAYS
WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

APRIL 1997

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SATURDAY, APRIL 5th

DRAGNET (10-11-51) Jack Webb stars as Sgt. Joe Friday with Barton Yarborough as Ben Romero. A wave of shoplifting hits the city. Fatima Cigarettes, NBC. (26:30)

JIMMY DURANTE SHOW (10-29-47) The Schnozz with guest Lucille Ball and regulars Candy Candido, Arthur Treacher, Elvia Allman, Alan Reed. The Sportsmen Quartet sub for Peggy Lee. Lucy and Jimmy in a murder mystery sketch. Rexall, NBC. (28:30)

IMAGINATION THEATRE (4-28-96) "A double feature movie for your mind." 1. "The Gatekeeper." What is the secret beneath the rubble of an old San Francisco movie house demolished in an earthquake? 2. "The Perfect Man." The party's search for a perfect political candidate is over, but there's only one trouble with the squeaky-clean candidate. Syndicated. (45:00)

SCREEN DIRECTORS PLAYHOUSE (11-11-49) "Body and Soul" starring John Garfield recreating his original screen role in this radio version of the 1947 film. Cast includes Barbara Eiler, Wally Maher, Bill Conrad, Steve Dunne, Ralph Moody, Hans Conried. Sustaining, NBC. (29:53)

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 25: **And Now ... the News** concerns the genesis of newscasting on radio, its growing pains, and its emergence as a viable and important phase of communication. (30:00)

SATURDAY, APRIL 12th
REMEMBERING WALTER O'KEEFE

ROYAL GELATIN HOUR (1-14-37) *Excerpt* as host Rudy Vallee introduces **Walter O'Keefe** who presents a topical monolog with mention of the new Social Security Act. (6:32)

DOUBLE OR NOTHING (1-2-48) Emcee **Walter O'Keefe** puts contestants through their paces in this popular comedy-quiz show. Campbell Soup, CBS. (27:42)

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (3-24-49) George and Gracie welcome guest **Walter O'Keefe**. George looks forward to reminiscing with O'Keefe about their vaudeville days. Cast features Gale Gordon, Elliott Lewis, Bill Goodwin, Meredith Willson and the orchestra. Announcer is Toby Reed. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29:16)

COMMAND PERFORMANCE #187 (8-9-45) **Walter O'Keefe** is master of ceremonies and guests include Marilyn Maxwell, Rita Hayworth, Town Criers, Les Paul Trio. O'Keefe is in Hollywood to start his own motion picture company as he tries to sign Marilyn and Rita. Marilyn sings "I Got Rhythm." AFRS. (30:22)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (1-7-48) *Excerpt* as host Bing Crosby and guest **Walter O'Keefe** present a musical salute to Al Jolson and then are

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TRANSCRIPT

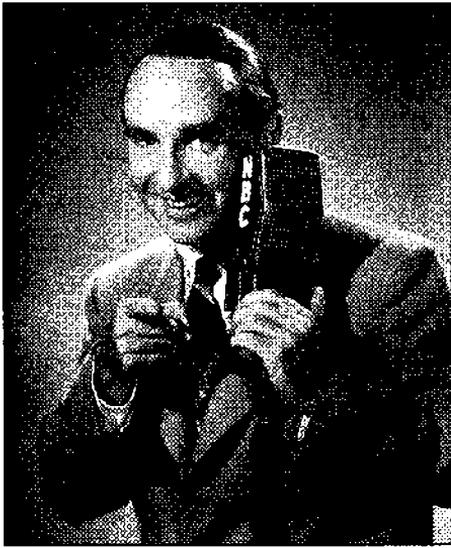
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WALTER O'KEEFE

joined by Brace Beemer as The Lone Ranger for a western sketch. (13:35)

KRAFT MUSIC HALL (1-29-48) Al Jolson stars with Oscar Levant, Ken Carpenter and Lou Bring and the orchestra. Guest is **Walter O'Keefe** who joins Al in a "Serenade to Bing Crosby." Kraft Foods, NBC. (28:36)

BING CROSBY SHOW (5-2-51) Bing welcomes vaudevillian Bert Wheeler, who claims that Bing stole one of his jokes, and **Walter O'Keefe**, who tries to get Bing to pay Wheeler. Bing, Bert and Walter sing "Once Upon A Nickel." Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (27:50)

SATURDAY, APRIL 19th THIS DAY — THAT YEAR

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (4-19-42, exactly 55 years ago today) Jack and the regulars: Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Frank Nelson (as Virgil the sound man), Percy Kilbride (as the druggist). The gang has breakfast at the drug store. Jell-O, NBC. (28:27)

PREDICT A HIT (4-19-49, exactly 48 years ago today) Students from Chicago's Senn High School predict the next big hit songs. Art Van Damme Quintet, vocals by Bob Morris, announcer is Chuck Mountain. Perk Dog Food, WMAQ, Chicago. (14:40)

BOB HOPE SHOW (4-19-49, exactly 48 years ago today) Guest Jimmy Durante joins Bob, Doris Day, Bill Farrell, Irene Ryan, Hy Averback,

and Les Brown and the orchestra. Hope and Durante compare noses and notes. Jimmy plans to change his character for television. Swan Soap, NBC. (27:57)

GENERAL DOUGLAS MAC ARTHUR (4-19-51, exactly 46 years ago today) Charles Collingwood anchors coverage of General MacArthur's speech before a joint session of Congress. This follows MacArthur's return to the United States after being relieved of his command by President Harry Truman. This is the *complete* "Old Soldiers Never Die" speech. CBS. (25:15; 19:31)

SUSPENSE (4-19-54, exactly 43 years ago today) "The Card Game" starring Richard Widmark in the story of a man who tried to learn a lesson the hard way by betting his life on the turn of a card. Cast includes Jay Novello, Hy Averback, Lou Krugman. Harlow Wilcox announces. Autolite, CBS. (28:27)

GUNSMOKE (4-19-59, exactly 38 years ago today) "Third Son" stars William Conrad as Marshall Matt Dillon, with Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot, Howard McNear as Doc Adams, and Georgia Ellis as Kitty Russell. An elderly woman from the East comes to Dodge City in search of her grandson. Cast includes Jeanette Nolan, Sam Edwards, Joe Kearns. Sustaining, CBS. (24:25)



GENERAL DOUGLAS MAC ARTHUR

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SATURDAY, APRIL 26th
27th ANNIVERSARY SHOW
"Thanks For Listening"

As we celebrate our twenty-seventh broadcast anniversary today, we'll express thanks to our listeners for sharing so many memories with us — and so many of our *Those Were The Days*' "spin-offs."

We'll observe the occasion by replaying one of our "spin-offs" — a complete three-hour "Hall Closet" morning "drive-time" broadcast from 1973 on WLTD, Evanston. Don't miss it if you can!

C H U C K
SCHADEN'S HALL CLOSET (10-1-73) Schaden brings vintage radio to mornings with a program of old-time radio shows, personality recordings, comedy records, trivia, time and temperature reports, and local and national news from the Mutual Broadcasting System. You'll hear commercials for the Hall Closet Cassette of the Month, Edens Plaza Shopping Center, Townhouse TV and Appliances, Miller Brothers Lumber, Chicago Today, Polk Brothers, Hansen From Copenhagen, Nelson-Hirschberg Ford, Bank of Lincolnwood, and North West Federal Savings. Musical recordings by Jimmy Durante, Marlene Dietrich, Four Aces, and the original cast of

"Damn Yankees." Comedy is provided by Nichols and May. Staff announcer Bob Abella has news headlines. Plus these vintage broadcasts:

GI JOURNAL #83 (2-23-45) George Burns and Gracie Allen star with Robert Young, Paula Winslowe, Ginny Simms, The Ginger Snaps, Mel Blanc (as Pvt. Sad Sack). AFRS. (30:00)

EDDIE CANTOR WITH A HALF HOUR OF SHOW BUSINESS (1950s) The show biz legend plays vintage records and tells stories about Sophie Tucker, Ted Lewis, Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, Will Rogers, and Clayton, Jackson and Durante. AFRS re broadcast. (25:00)

PEPPER YOUNG'S

FAMILY (1950s) Isolated episode of the long-running daytime drama. Syndicated. (15:00)

BIG SISTER (1950s) Isolated episode of the long-running daytime drama. Syndicated. (15:00)

NOTE: Segment times for the complete Hall Closet Show (in nine parts): 13:53; 26:55; 17:30; 15:20; 30:45; 12:20; 26:35; 14:19; 13:23. Total: 171 minutes.



SATURDAY, MAY 3rd

SUSPENSE (1-16-47) "Overture in Two keys" starring Joan Bennett with Howard Duff, Joe Kearns, Hans Conried. The wife of a music professor falls in love with her husband's student. Roma Wines, CBS. (28:53)

ARRIVAL OF THE HINDENBURG (5-6-37, *almost exactly sixty years ago.*) Announcer Herb Morrison, at Lakehurst, New Jersey to record the arrival of the airship Hindenburg from Friedrichshafen, Germany, ends up covering one of the great aviation disasters when the ship exploded and crashed. Recording engineer Charles Nehlsen captured the dramatic events on discs which were later broadcast on the full NBC network, the first *recording* ever broadcast on the NBC in its ten year history. This is a rather complete presentation of the original recording. WLS/NBC. (15:35; 8:00; 14:58) *See the article about the Hindenburg Disaster on Page 26.*

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (9-16-45) The Nelsons star with Tommy Bernard and Henry Blair as David and Ricky, John Brown as neighbor Thorny. In order to pass the initiation into the Unicorns Lodge, Ozzie must be totally agreeable for twenty-four hours. International Silver Company, CBS. (29:50)

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (7-22-48) "The Citadel" highlights the struggles of a young doctor in a coal mining town. James Hilton hosts. Hallmark cards, CBS. (30:15)

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 26: **News... the War Years** covers the development of news on the air from 1935-1945. (30:00)

SATURDAY, MAY 10th

IMAGINATION THEATRE (5-5-96) "A double feature movie for the mind." 1. "The Bouganville Giant." Natives on a South Pacific Island are terrorized by a swarm of seven-foot moths which rest on an inactive volcano. 2. "Nightmare." A sky-diver repeatedly dreams his 'chute doesn't open, but his wife awakens him each time before he dreams that he hits the ground. Syndicated. (45:00)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (5-9-43) Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. Summerfield's water commissioner has plans for a busy day at the office, but Leila — the future Mrs. Gildersleeve — has other plans. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30:30)

MAN CALLED X (9-18-47) Herbert Marshall stars as globe-trotting secret agent Ken Thurston with Leon Belasco as sidekick Pagan Zeldschmidt. A plane carrying American scientists is mysteriously lost while flying from Singapore to Manila. AFRS rebroadcast. (25:37)

PHIL HARRIS — ALICE FAYE SHOW (10-10-48) Frankie Remley (Elliott Lewis) has signed a contract to be the star of the show and is throwing his weight around. Rexall, NBC. (28:45)

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 27: **Listen and Learn** examines the role of education in radio, beginning with college and university educational stations and their conflict with the commercial networks. (30:00)

SATURDAY, MAY 17TH

BULLDOG DRUMMOND (1941) "The Hijackers" starring George Coulouris as Drummond with Everett Sloane as Denny. This is an audition program, being offered to stations by the Mutual Broadcasting System in advance of its premiere September 21, 1941. Drummond takes to the road to break up a hijacking ring. MBS. (26:35)

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH (1995) In this personal career memoir, Fred Foy, longtime announcer-narrator of *The Lone Ranger* remembers those thrilling days of yesteryear and recalls the long-running radio series, including the actors who played the many roles. Special Recording. (8:45; 22:00; 10:34)

SUSPENSE (1-23-47) "One Way Street" starring Roddy McDowell, with Cathy Lewis, Joseph Kearns. A homeless young lad in post-war London returns to live with his crooked uncle who has just married a wealthy widow. Roma Wines, CBS. (30:24)

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (3-26-46) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees, with Arthur Q. Brian, Bill Thompson, Gale Gordon, Bea Benadere, Harlow Wilcox, Jim Backus, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Notorious thug Bullets Brannigan is on the loose after breaking out of the Wistful Vista jail. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (29:33)

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 28: **The Other Networks** traces the establishment and development of three different American radio broadcast systems: National Public Radio, the Voice of America, and the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. (30:00)

Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

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

MAY 1997

SATURDAY, MAY 24th

BUCK ROGERS IN THE TWENTY-FIFTH CENTURY (4-4-39) An origin story episode tells how Buck, born in the 20th Century, came to be an adventurer in the 25th Century. Matt Crowley stars as Buck Rogers. Popsicle, Fudgesicle, Creamsicle. (14:35) *See the article about Buck Rogers on page 2.*

REFRESHMENT CLUB (11-23-36) First show in the series starring Don McNeill as host for an informal half hour of music and fun. Coca Cola. (29:26)

SUSPENSE (1-30-47) "Three Blind Mice" starring Van Heflin with Joseph Kearns and Cathy Lewis. A member of a law firm is suspicious of his partners. Roma Wines, CBS. (29:11)

PAUL GIBSON (1-29-55) *Excerpt.* Chicago's most opinionated radio personality discusses chivalry and knights of olde. WBBM. (14:55)

PAUL GIBSON (8-17-55) *Excerpt.* Chicago's ultimate male chauvinist complains about wives who have let themselves go. WBBM. (4:35)

IMAGINATION THEATRE (5-12-96) "A double feature movie for your mind." 1. "The Eddie Mayhew Matter." When a famous jazz musician dies without a will, his son hires detective Harry Nile to help him collect a fortune. 2. "Woman's Work is Never Done." A miserly farmer forbids his wife to take a break from her drudgery in order to take violin lessons. Syndicated. (45:00)

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 29: **All Things Remembered** begins a two-part retrospective on the subjects covered in the entire 30-part series, beginning with the discoveries which led to the birth of radio. (30:00)

SATURDAY, MAY 31st

**JACK ARMSTRONG,
THE ALL-AMERICAN BOY!**

The Mystery of the Sunken Reef

We present a Jack Armstrong adventure complete in ten, fifteen minute episodes, originally broadcast between Monday, December 23, 1940 and Friday, January 3, 1941.

Most after-school kids' shows had stories that unfolded over many, many weeks or even months and some never reached a natural conclusion with all the loose ends tied together. But this sequence originally ran over the Christmas holiday break, giving youngsters of the forties a two-week opportunity to hear a complete adventure while they were home from school.

The Mystery of the Sunken Reef is top notch listening, an excellent example of the world of after school radio.

Charles Flynn stars as Jack Armstrong; John Gannon and Sarajane Wells are Billy and Betty Fairfield; James Goss is Uncle Jim. The announcer is the legendary Franklin MacCormack and he'll have you eating every ounce of Wheaties you can find in your home or neighborhood!

Each of the ten episodes runs approximately 14 minutes and 30 seconds.

—PLUS—

PLEASE STAND BY — A History of Radio (1986) Lesson 30: **The End of the Beginning** is the conclusion of the 30-part series and reviews audience participation and quiz shows; the changing music scene; sports; talk shows; storytellers, and gossip columnists; news; education; the "other" networks. (30:00)

...and for more good listening...

ART HELLER SHOW-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities. **now in his 51st year on the air!** *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9 am-1 pm; Sunday, 2-6 pm.*

DICK LAWRENCE REVUE-- A treasure trove of rare and vintage recordings with spoken memories from the never to be forgotten past. *WNIB, 97.1 FM, Saturday, 8-9 pm.*

REMEMBER WHEN-- Host Don Corey calls this his "four-hour nostalgia fest" with the emphasis on old time radio musical and variety shows, plus show tunes and interviews. *WAIT, 850 AM, Sunday, noon-4 pm.*

WHEN RADIO WAS-- Carl Amari hosts a weekend edition of the popular series which features old time radio broadcasts and interviews. *WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday and Sunday, 10pm-midnight.*

"When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
April, 1997 Schedule				
	1 Life of Riley Pt 2 Green Hornet	2 Rocky Fortune Fibber Mc Gee Pt 1	3 Fibber Mc Gee Pt 2 The Whistler	4 The Shadow Vic and Sade
7 Lone Ranger Burns & Allen Pt 1	8 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Suspense	9 Lights Out Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	10 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Dragnet	11 Gangbusters Strange Dr. Weird
14 Texas Rangers Abbott & Costello Pt 1	15 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Philip Marlowe	16 Gunsmoke Phil Harris-Alice Faye/1	17 Phil Harris-Alice Faye/2 Box Thirteen	18 Suspense Lum and Abner
21 The Shadow Graat Gildersleeve Pt 1	22 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Six Shooter	23 Boston Blackie Life of Riley Pt 1	24 Life of Riley Pt 2 Have Gun, Will Travel	25 Jack Benny Unsolved Mysteries
28 Lone Ranger Information Please Pt 1	29 Information Please Pt 2 Sam Spade	30 Sergeant Preston Maisie Pt 1		
May, 1997 Schedule				
			1 Maisie Pt 2 Green Hornet	2 The Shadow Bob and Ray
5 Superman Fibber Mc Gee Pt 1	6 Fibber Mc Gee Pt 2 Lone Ranger	7 The Whistler Burns & Allen Pt 1	8 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Texas Rangers	9 Dragnet Vic and Sade
12 Escape Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	13 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Philip Marlowe	14 Gunsmoke Abbott & Costello Pt 1	15 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Boston Blackie	16 Have Gun, Will Travel Lum and Abner
19 Box Thirteen Johnny Dollar Pt 1 of 5	20 Six Shooter Johnny Dollar Pt 2 of 5	21 Jack Benny Johnny Dollar Pt 3 of 5	22 Sam Spade Johnny Dollar Pt 4 of 5	23 Great Gildersleeve Johnny Dollar Pt 5 of 5
26 Sergeant Preston Duffy's Tavern Pt 1	27 Duffy's Tavern Pt 2 The Saint	28 Suspense Life of Riley Pt 1	29 Life of Riley Pt 2 CBS Radio Workshop/1	30 CBS Radio Workshop/2 Unsolved Mysteries

HINDENBURG DISASTER

End of One Era/Beginning of Another

By BILL OATES, JR and BILL OATES, SR

With the close of the twentieth century near, those who resided in the time period can look back on a number of catastrophic events which were brought into their homes with an immediacy as never previously felt.

Thanks to the advent of radio and television, audiences around the world were able share a closeness to whatever current event the station chose to broadcast, sometimes with shocking results.

The single most impressive newsworthy broadcast that captured the attention of listeners first was the crash of the great zeppelin *Hindenburg* sixty years ago on May 6, 1937. For the first time in the history of mass communication the catastrophe was recorded for the listeners and reported for Chicago's WLS radio by an astounded young newsman, Herb Morrison.

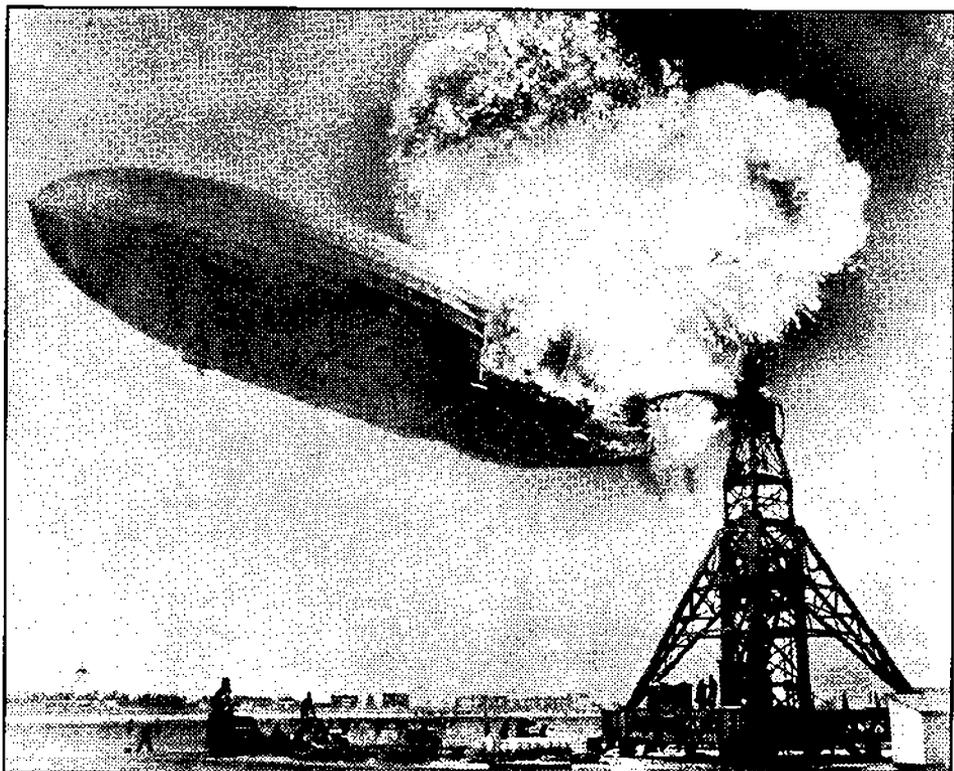
The zeppelin was climaxing its peak in popularity as the most luxurious and expeditious for air travel in the late 1930's. Its brief run as a vehicle for transporting passengers began when its namesake, German Count Ferdinand Von Zeppelin, streamlined lighter-than-airships and chris-

tened his LZ-1 (*Luftschiff Zeppelin 1*) in 1900.

His interest in flying machines began when he witnessed Union observation balloons during the American Civil War, and, at first, he intended on building a maneuverable flying machine that would be useful to the German Army. The military showed no interest, and besides, at this time in history, no combat aircraft flew for any country. Disasters and public apathy followed Zeppelin's subsequent experiments, and it appeared that his dream would die, until what seemed as his ultimate setback actually mustered nationalistic pride. When his LZ-4 crashed in 1908, the citizenry rallied around the Count and convinced Kaiser Wilhelm to help fund future airship projects.

The resulting financial shot in the arm encouraged Zeppelin to rehabilitate his LZ-3 and start work on the LZ-5. Because of an infusion of governmental money, a side venture was established to accommodate another outlet for airship production, the world's first airline, DELAG. During the summer of 1910, the *Deutschland* (LZ-5) began transporting passengers within Germany and to ports linking them with steamship lines. It would be four more years before the first scheduled airplane passenger flights began when a seasonal Florida

Bill Oates, Jr., of Kouts, Indiana, a regular contributor to these pages, collaborated on this article with his father, Bill Oates, Sr., a zeppelin buff who lives in Brownstown, Indiana.



PHOTOFEST

THE GERMAN ZEPPELIN *HINDENBURG* EXPLODES AT LAKEHURST, N.J., MAY 6, 1937.

company flew for only one summer. Airline passenger service started in earnest, but not with airplanes.

For over a century, when the intrepid French Montgolfier brothers first sent aloft a hot air balloon over Paris in 1783, man attempted to soar with the birds. Numerous attempts during the nineteenth century, some with tragic outcomes, placed human acrobats in lighter-than-air crafts, as well as gliders. The most dramatic event occurred when the Wright brothers modified glider designs that were tested on the dunes of southern Lake Michigan and transformed them into the first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina in 1903. Parallel to this event, aviators around the world, and especially in America, attempted to compete with the success of

Count Zeppelin's experiments.

The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company was the first American firm to build lighter-than-air craft like the Germans were turning out. The Akron, Ohio firm built a small airship for a private aviator in 1911, and by 1919 its *Wingfoot Express* was ready to leave its base at the White City Amusement Park at 63rd and South Park Avenue in Chicago. The components were tested and assembled in Akron, then sent to the company's western base for assembly and a Windy City inaugural flight. (Chicago played an important part of the airship's formative years, when individuals like the appropriately named Captain Wild flew his sausage shaped *Eagle* over the city around 1905, while he balanced precariously on the framework.) Tragi-

HINDENBURG DISASTER

cally, the 95,000 cubic foot hydrogen-filled envelope ignited the *Express* over the Loop, and ten men died. For future American lighter-than-air ventures, good was derived from this accident, because natural, non-flammable Texas helium was substituted, and fire would not be a major hindrance to safety.

Experiments continued as Goodyear built and successfully flew its Pony Blimps, smaller airships that were ninety-five feet long and the mainstay of the industry for years to come. For the next decade and a half, airship enthusiasts who followed their excursions on a line between airship hubs of Chicago, Akron, and Lakehurst, New Jersey, experienced the joy of viewing the great sky giants floating across the sky. Expositions like the Chicago Aero Show of 1920 and the Century of Progress Exposition of 1933-4 created opportunities for the aviation supporters to see the pride of America's fleet close up.

The two sides of Zeppelin company's endeavors grew as the need for passenger ships increased and the German war machine reared its ugly head. DELAG's LZ-11, the *Viktoria Luise*, began passenger service in 1912, but two years later, the German navy commandeered it for naval exercises. Eventually, the German army also commissioned military craft to be added to their war preparations, and by 1915 England was targeted to receive the first bombs in history to be dropped by an air-craft.

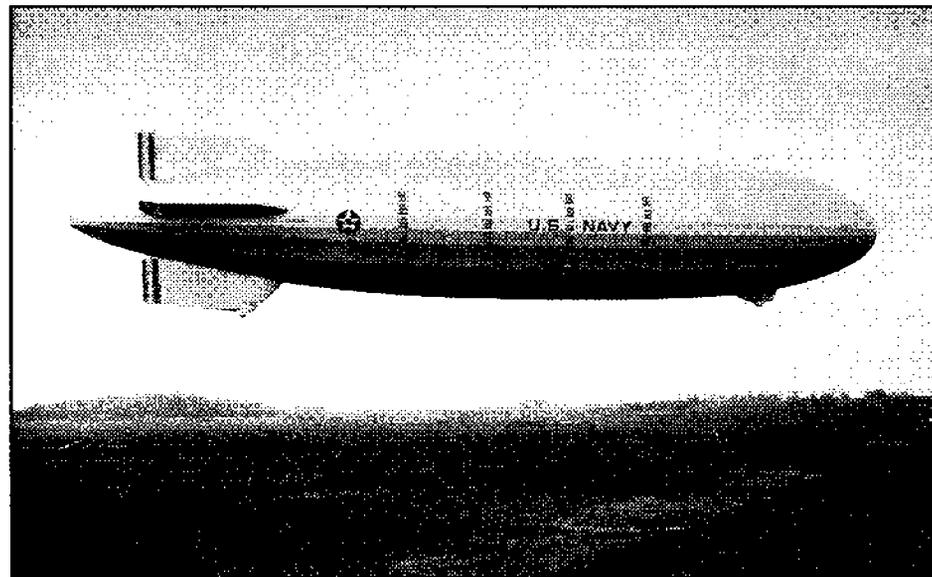
In the early days of World War I, the graceful, lumbering beasts visited Britain primarily during the nighttime. Although the zeppelin raids were successful in scaring those targeted below, the carrier of the bombs became the victim when a lone pilot brought down the LZ-37 in flames. Just as stealthily as zeppelins appeared over

enemy land, they also had a time getting away because they were a large, slow and explosive target. Coupled with a variety of problems, lighter-than aircraft would never again be used as offensive weapons of war. Ironically, the British began using their own airships, smaller blimps to accompany transport ships and scout for submarines. Later, when the United States entered the War, the D-2, the first of the 'B' class blimps, was built in Chicago in 1917 and intended for patrol along the American coasts.

With Germany's military machine in ruins after the First World War, the country's efforts to continue their world domination in airship travel was thrown a setback. In the meantime, England, Italy, Norway, and the United States were among the countries to fly the next generation of zeppelins, some of which were ex-German ships taken as war reparations. Many of these airships of the 1920's met with disaster, but not before at least two aviation records were set: eight years before Charles Lindberg's transatlantic crossing, the British naval craft R-34 flew from Scotland to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and the Norwegian *Norge* flew to the North Pole in 1926.

America had its first try at a full scale zeppelin when it built the *Shenandoah* (ZR-1) in 1923, and the vehicle was to have reached the North Pole by air first; however, in exercises to determine its distance worthiness, it crashed two years later in the southern Ohio hills. Because of earlier disasters with hydrogen filled airships, this first American built ship was outfitted with helium; however, Midwestern autumn thunderstorms buffeted it about with the result of fourteen crew members killed, the first of three tragedies that struck the American lighter-than-air fleet.

Although numerous world wide accidents were claiming many zeppelins and



THE U.S. NAVY'S AKRON. "THE NEW BATTLESHIP OF THE SKIES."

members of their crews, Goodyear pressed on with its designs for a sleek, safer craft. To expand its fleet, the U.S. Navy ordered a German made airship once the zeppelin works were functioning post-war. Completed in 1924, the LZ-126 became the *Los Angeles*, the first of the new generation of American airships, and the U.S. ship which would log the most miles without incident. Hoping to increase the fleet, Goodyear had the *Akron* underway. At its unveiling on August 8, 1931, CBS announcer Ted Husing told a network audience that it was "the new battleship of the skies."

While Goodyear and the United States Navy were building flying aircraft carriers (both the *Akron* and its sister ship *Macon* had compartments from which airplanes could be launched and retrieved), the new generation of German zeppelins set goals for increased passenger service. The first of them was the most successful of all rigid airships, the *Graf Zeppelin* (the name came from the German reference for the Count), logged more miles than any other, and its appearance as LZ-127 in 1928 meant that

it would also represent the end of the era for the zeppelin.

The dimensions of this last period of airships were staggering. The *Graf's* hull capacity held 3.7 million cubic feet, while from nose to tail it was longer than any before at 775 feet. One comparison to the airship's length is the Empire State Building, which measures 1,250 feet. Not to be outdone when it was finished, the *Akron* measured 785 feet. It was built in a black, barn-like building in Akron that was the world's largest edifice without interior support, until the Vehicle Assemble Building was erected by NASA for the preparation of the space shuttle at Cape Kennedy. So huge was the Goodyear-Zeppelin plant that clouds formed in its ceiling, and workers could be getting wet inside, although there might not be rain outside. The 1,175 foot long structure stands today as a monument to a bygone era.

While the zeppelins were delighting thousands of Depression weary fans on the ground, radio microphones and newsreel cameras took every opportunity to capture

HINDENBURG DISASTER

the sights and sounds of what must have seemed like the future of aviation. In the 1930's, airplanes were faster but much smaller, and they certainly could not make the distance across the Atlantic Ocean without refueling. It was the zeppelin, a peaceful transporter of wealthy patrons and special airmail that caught the attention of the masses, while helping people forget the First Great War and the shenanigans being brewed by Adolf Hitler that would ferment into a second global conflict. With American and German ships plying the skies, it was time for the originators of the vehicle to build their ultimate model, the *Hindenburg*.

The success of the *Graf* and the initial successes of the Goodyear-Navy airships encouraged the Germans to build the LZ-128. However, because the last British rigid ship, the R-101, suffered a horrible crash in 1930, plans were abandoned and a new model, one which could accommodate helium, was started as the LZ-129. Before the *Hindenburg* could have access to the safer gas, it had to prove itself airworthy with less expensive hydrogen. Construction began in 1931, but because the Great Depression was deepening and the German political winds were shaky, its progress was slowed.

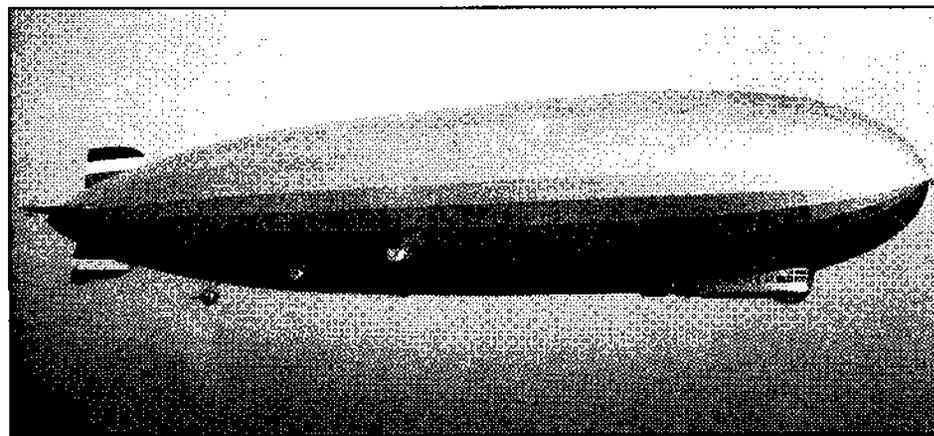
In early 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed German chancellor by an aging President Paul Von Hindenburg. The former war hero fought Hitler's radical Nazi organization in the 1920's but was forced to appoint its leader to the second highest position in the country when it became the dominant party in the *Reich*. Ironically, Hindenburg died a year after making the appointment, and Hitler immediately abolished the office of presidency, elevating himself to German supreme ruler. Zeppelin production had been suffering

from weak financial support, but the Nazi dominated government, led by feuding Propaganda Minister Goebbels and Air Minister Goring, infused new money into the airship program, and the LZ-129 was completed by the end of 1935.

Although respected airmen like Dr. Hugo Eckener fumed over the new zeppelin's, as well as the *Graf's*, use to distribute Nazi leaflets nearly as soon as it was completed, bedecked with giant swastikas on its tailfins, the *Hindenburg* began crusading for the party. Before the airship was named, the American press assumed that it would be called the *Hitler*, but even *Der Fuhrer* was not egotistical enough to name anything for himself that might meet some calamitous end. With a voyage to South America and its majestic presence in the background of the 1936 Berlin Olympic stadium, conscientious airmen bit their tongues as they proudly flew the technologically best passenger airship, which also spread Hitler's propaganda.

The American fascination with airships continued throughout the Depression, providing the weary with some enjoyment in hard times. The city of Chicago made good on its promise to invite the world to a celebration at its Century of Progress Exposition. All sorts of predictions about the future were represented, and the presence of airships, from the compact sized Goodyear *Pilgrim* and *Reliance*, which had a small flying field at the fair where passengers could actually fly in a blimp, to its gigantic relative, the transatlantic bound *Graf Zeppelin*, appeared to the delight of fairgoers. However, during the run of the Chicago Exposition, tragedy struck the American fleet on both coasts.

The last two American airships, the *Akron* and *Macon*, were completed two years apart, and two years later each respectively crashed. First the *Akron* was lost in foul weather off the New Jersey Coast before



GERMANY'S GRAF ZEPPELIN

the *Macon* made its maiden flight, and later the second airship suffered the same fate when its damaged tail fin caused it to crash in the Pacific. The U.S. government had had enough of the impressive but costly airships. The *Los Angeles*, which was idled for eight years once the aforementioned ships were flying, was dismantled. If there was any doubt as to the future of American zeppelins, the *Hindenburg* punctuated their death knell.

Even though the two German airships became a propaganda tool for the Nazi regime, hundreds of satisfied passengers boarded the luxurious zeppelins for lengthy travel. Before it was decommissioned, the *Graf* made thirteen successful global revolutions, and trips to South America became routine. The *Hindenburg* began regular visits to North America, and with the link to inland cities via carriers like American Airlines, the future looked bright. Wealthy passengers were willing to spend twenty-five per cent more than steamship fares or \$400 for a one way or \$720 for a round trip from the German zeppelin base at Friedrichshafen to Lakehurst, a trip that took 65 hours to America and 52 for the return trip. Not only did this considerably cut the travel time because the airship could

cruise at near ninety miles per hour, but it also gave the passengers an incredibly smoother ride than when buffeted about on the ocean.

Once launched, the *Hindenburg* became the largest aircraft ever to fly, a feature that added to its overall luxurious package. At 803 feet, it was more than double the length of a 747 jumbo jet. The added size allowed more room for gas to lift the zeppelin, while protecting it from changing weather conditions that often spawned nauseous results in airplanes of the same era. Sumptuous meals, an aluminum frame piano playing in a well stocked bar, and a stateroom to rival those on the finest ocean liners gave the fifty passengers a first class trip to North or South America. So smooth was the take-off that passengers often did not know that they were aloft until they peered out the windows and saw people and buildings shrinking below.

Dr. Eckener met with President Roosevelt in early 1937 and received landing rights for ten visits at Lakehurst that year. Even though the German ambassador had been warned that anti-Nazi saboteurs might set off a bomb in the ship, passengers and cargo were searched, and the first scheduled flight to the United States

HINDENBURG DISASTER

was underway on May 3, 1937.

The radio industry had been growing parallel to the giant airships during the decades of the 1920's and 30's, and the arrival of the *Hindenburg* was not quite as newsworthy as it might have been when it first started flying. Had it been the maiden voyage, 200-300 reporters would have covered the event, but this was to have been another routine landing, so only a handful gathered at Lakehurst. Current practice of the day disallowed the recording of most news events, and because of the persuasiveness of WLS newsman Herb Morrison, a rare black transcription disk was made of the airship's arrival. Chicago's interest in the event was at least two-fold: those arriving from Europe might travel on to the nation's transportation hub via a DC 3, and



HERB MORRISON

the city was host to one of two network broadcasting centers.

Morrison had his engineer Charlie Nehlsen set up the recording machine as the spring rains came down at Lakehurst. It was good that the arrival, which could have been routine, was not broadcast live, for the great zeppelin was delayed thirteen hours because of area thunderstorms. The *Hindenburg* returned to New York City over which it had flown a few hours before until the weather front abated in central New Jersey. Anticipation for airship service in the nation's largest city was so great that a mooring mast was attached atop the Empire State Building, and even though it was never used it is curious to picture passengers disembarking at the point of the world's tallest building. Frequently, when the airship passed over baseball stadiums, games were suspended so that all in attendance could view the behemoths floating by gracefully. However, all of the hoopla was abating, for the arrival of the *Hindenburg* for its first of eighteen flights to North America in 1937 was just part of its new routine.

Once the all clear for landing was sent from Lakehurst, the giant airship moved south for the last half hour of its trip. As the craft came into view, Morrison began his thrilling narrative. Because the *Hindenburg's* huge form could be seen from miles, the announcer had time to carefully set up his report. Routine descriptions like how beautiful the zeppelin looked floating gracefully toward the mooring mast began the narration. As Morrison continued on about how eager the passengers must have been as they were waving to the crowds below, he told the listening audience that the great diesel motors maneuvered the great airship into place and suspended it so that the 150 members of the ground crew could grab the ropes so it could be safely tethered. All of the crew



THE HINDENBURG

members had very specific landing duties and special positions to steady the descent of the vehicle. Here is Herb Morrison's eyewitness description:

"It's starting to rain again. The rain had slacked up a little bit. The back motors of the ship are just holding it, uh, just enough to keep it from ... It's burst into flames. Get this, Charlie! Get this. Charlie! It's crashing, it's crashing, and it's crashing terrible. [A woman can be heard screaming in the background.] Oh, my. Get out of the way, please. It's burning, bursting into flames, and it's falling on the mooring mast. And all of the folks. This is terrible: this is one of the worst catastrophes in the world. Oh ... four or five hundred feet into the sky, and it's a terrific crash ladies and gentlemen. The smoke and the flames now. And the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast.

Oh, the humanity and all of the passengers, screaming around here."

Morrison had to leave the air for a few minutes to compose himself and purge the smoke he inhaled. When the reporter returned, he corrected himself, realizing that not all had been killed in this thirty-seven second fireball demolition, rather that many passengers and crew members were able to jump to their safety, some barely hurt. When the toll was taken, miraculously only thirty-five people on the ship and one crewman on the ground were killed out of ninety-eight on board. Most of the fatalities were crew members who were busily preparing the ship for landing and were farther away from the ground than the fare paying riders.

Although what happened to the *Hindenburg* probably will never be known, two key theories abound. First, the inves-

HINDENBURG DISASTER

tigations officially recognized by the Americans and Germans indicated that a combination of the lines being thrown from the ship that grounded the craft, a gas leak, and static electricity that sent the spark from the tail section, ignited the hydrogen and brought it down immediately. It was a common practice to "off gas" some hydrogen upon landing to allow the ship to settle to the ground, and perhaps static electricity joined with the gas for the fatal results.

Those who knew the reliability of the German zeppelins discounted this theory (none had blown up under these conditions before, and this ship was state of the art) and believed that a bomb sabotaged the *Hindenburg*, the result of an attack on an increasingly militaristic Germany that needed public humiliation. The Nazi regime absolutely refused to allow any of its experts to defend such an idea that would be an affront to Hitler's Germany. However, there was no time to silence Captain Ernst Lehmann before he publicly insisted upon the bomb theory just before he died of burns in a New Jersey hospital. Certainly there was cause for believing that sabotage was the reason, but either argument was moot, for in two years the world would once again be at war and such airships had no place in a much faster and more hostile environment. Even upon examination of the newsreel films today, because the cameramen had their lenses trained on the ground where a safe landing was anticipated, no one can tell exactly why or where the original flame appeared.

In a few brief seconds an aviation era came to an incendiary end, while radio reporting began to cover news events with an immediacy that no other medium could demonstrate. Even though Herb Morrison's recording was not live, his chilling, impromptu description was played to

a stunned WLS Chicago audience the next day at noon, and the NBC network offered it several hours later. Newspapers on the seventh of May showed the great zeppelin eerily sinking in flames, and the newsreels added their footage to the motion picture bills the next week. Taken all together, America was using its communications resources to chronicle a phenomenal historical event, a practice that unfortunately would be used at even greater length when the aforementioned Adolf Hitler, who encouraged the building of the peaceful *Hindenburg*, turned on the civilized world and ignited the Second World War.

One more zeppelin was christened by the Germans. Because of the laudatory record of the Graf, the Graf Zeppelin II was launched in 1938. Although the new ship was named for the most successful of all airships (the first flew over one million miles, crossed the Atlantic 144 times, and carried over 13,000 passengers without incident), the older ship was replaced because the helium that would fill the tanks on the new airships would not provide enough lift. When the *Hindenburg* crashed at Lakehurst, the Graf was making its last South American flight, but the captain did not alarm the passengers by telling them what had happened to the other German zeppelin. The Graf II was immediately pressed into service in the early days of the Second World War, and when it was sent to spy on radar sites in Britain, it tuned to the wrong frequencies and consequently allowed the enemy to detect incoming German planes. Had it been successful in its mission, the Battle of Britain might have had a different outcome. Sadly, because there was no place in the modern Luftwaffe for zeppelins, the last ones were dismantled so their metal might be used for more modern aircraft. The great hangers that housed the airships were blown up to allow German bombers better access to the airfield,



HONORS-- For their coverage of the *Hindenburg* disaster, Herb Morrison (center) and engineer Charles Nehlsen (right) receive watches from WLS president Burrigge D. Butler.

and the Allies bombed what was left at Friedrichshafen in 1944. To expedite to its obsolescence as a passenger transporting vehicle, the zeppelin was closer to replacement when a German passenger plane made its first transatlantic crossing in 1938 and arrived in New York City.

Although the days of the giant airships ended as the Second World War gained momentum, new generations of lighter-than-aircraft soon followed. Ironically, to help the war effort, Goodyear designed a new model blimp, the K-ship, and its success was such that only one was shot down of the 168 commissioned to fly the length of America's coasts and to accompany ship convoys in search of submarines. Its ancestors continue to fly between points like Wingfoot Lake hanger in Akron and special events in places like those in Chicago. The onboard computerized signs hawk the wares of those who use the world's largest advertising surface, and television viewers wishing a bird's eye view of a sporting event from a easygoing, steady perch can zoom in on a game below from the likes of the Goodyear and other blimps. The ad-

vertising is not an income producer for the tire company, just a way to give the networks ad space on the world's largest billboard in trade for television exposure. At the Zeppelin Works in Friedrichshafen, new state of the art airships for sightseers were again being assembled in 1995. A century after his initial experiments, Count Ferdinand Von Zeppelin's dream of cigar shaped lighter-

than-air craft stays aloft.

Herb Morrison continued reporting on radio and later television and telling people his once-in-a-lifetime experience and how glad he was that he convinced his bosses at WLS to let him record what was to have been a relatively routine news report. He eventually moved to Pittsburgh to become the first news director at WTAE-TV, and then finished his working days at West Virginia University. He died in 1989 at 83.

The age of zeppelins has not been forgotten. In 1972, Michael M. Mooney published what he thought might have happened in May of 1937 in *The Hindenburg*, a book which was made into a star-studded movie three years later. Even a generation far removed from the giant airships are reminded of their existence by the name of the rock group *Led Zeppelin*. However, with the passage of time, archival recordings and footage of the giant airships that are broadcast over the radio or in television documentaries give most an opportunity to witness first hand accounts, captured forever because of early news reporters like Herb Morrison. ■

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The Play's the Thing



By BOB KOLOSOSKI

Recently the hottest movie scripts have been inspired by the works of William Shakespeare.

In the past six or seven years there have been two quality versions of *Hamlet*: the Mel Gibson film and Kenneth Branagh's brilliant four-hour adaptation.

Ian McKellen's version of *Richard III* was updated to a 1930s fascist Britain, but kept the original dialog intact. This fascinating and successful experiment with a Shakespearean play opened the door for other film producers to do the same. The

most recent version of *Romeo and Juliet* plays against the backdrop of Mexican slums and rival drug gangs. Again, the original Shakespearean language is used and adds to the success of this film.

Kenneth Branagh's filming of *Othello* with Laurence Fishburn as the noble Moor was not updated and was highly praised by the critics and did well at the box office.

Branagh is somewhat of a one-man crusader dedicated to filming as many of Shakespeare's works as possible. He has filmed a powerful version of *Henry V* and a light translation of *As You Like It*. His last film, however, is his best to date. *Hamlet* has been a challenge for the world's best actors for centuries. It was said that John Barrymore's stage interpretation of the Danish prince was a work of genius. The sad fact is that Barrymore was never given the chance to do *Hamlet* on film. It wasn't until 1948 that Laurence Olivier filmed his version of the mournful Dane. Olivier's film was a labor of love for him and it won the Academy Award for Best Picture of the Year, the first British film to be so honored.

Other distinguished actors who have portrayed Hamlet on screen include Hardy Kruger in a 1959 German version and Richard Burton in a 1964 film directed by Sir John Gielgud. Branagh's version takes place in the 19th century and is the most



PHOTOFEST

"TAMING OF THE SHREW" (1929)
Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford



PHOTOFFEST
"ROMEO AND JULIET" (1936)
Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer



PHOTOFFEST
"HENRY V" (1945)
Laurence Olivier

ambitious and majestic interpretation to date. The supporting cast includes Julie Christie, Derek Jacobi, Charlton Heston, John Mills, Richard Attenborough and Sir John Gielgud; an amazing cast in an amazing film.

It took nearly ninety years of filming Shakespeare to make his work an "overnight" success on the screen. Film pioneer George Melies produced a silent version of *Hamlet* in 1907. A silent *Hamlet* seems ridiculous because the true power of the play is in the dialogue, and yet fourteen silent versions were filmed in several different countries. There were almost as many silent versions of *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and other Shakespeare plays. The power of Shakespeare is obviously not only in his dialogue, but in the rich characters he presents to his audience.

When talking pictures became the rage many movie stars were laughed out of the business because of their poor speaking voices. Most feared the transition to sound would end their careers; only the most con-

fidant stars would take on Shakespeare.

In 1929 the most confident stars in Hollywood were Douglas Fairbanks and his wife Mary Pickford. They produced a talking version of *The Taming of the Shrew* that pleased their multitude of fans, if not the critics. It took nearly forty years for another husband and wife team to attempt a straight adaptation of the comedy. Richard Burton's deep voice was a natural for Shakespeare, but Elizabeth Taylor's skills were only adequate, thus making their effort interesting at best.

In between the two versions of *Shrew*, Cole Porter decided the play was well suited for a musical adaptation and he wrote *Kiss Me Kate*. It was first a hit on Broadway and then a Technicolor MGM film (in 3-D) starring Howard Keel and Kathryn Grayson. It was a fun movie and made a decent profit for the studio, leading other producers to surmise that Shakespeare set to music was an idea worth copying.

*Twenty years earlier Irving Thalberg was

THE PLAY'S THE THING

head of production at MGM and he was dedicated to producing quality films based on classic literature. Married to actress Norma Shearer, he was determined to have her play Juliet in a movie version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The problem he faced was finding a Romeo for his Juliet. Frederic March, Robert Montgomery and Robert Donat had turned down the part and Thalberg was worried that the project would not go forward. He finally signed Leslie Howard and was not bothered by the fact that both Howard and Shearer were in their mid thirties while the young lovers in the play were teen-aged. All the studio's resources were utilized, but the play failed to capture an audience and soured Louis B. Mayer to any future Shakespearean projects.

In the mid-fifties Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim wrote a musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. *West Side Story* became a blockbuster hit play and later a wildly successful motion picture. In 1968 Franco Zeffirelli tried his directorial hand at *Romeo and Juliet* and came close to capturing the mood of the original play, but his rapid movement camera style was too hip for the Bard.

In 1935 Warner Bros. produced *A Midsummer's Night Dream* with a cast of actors untrained in the classic theatre. Jack Warner hired famed German director Max Reinhardt to direct the play using the Warner Bros. stock company in all the key roles. Reinhardt was a master stage director, but was unfamiliar with movie production so William Dieterle was assigned to assist him. Erich Wolfgang Korngold was imported from Germany to compose the music and every PR man available worked overtime to promote the film. Somehow it all worked in spite of poor performances by James Cagney, Dick Powell and a few others. Jack Warner decided to leave



"HAMLET" (1948)
Laurence Olivier

PHOTO EST

Shakespeare to Irving Thalberg.

It would be ten years before a Shakespeare play would be widely accepted as a bankable movie project. Laurence Olivier filmed *Henry V* with a modest budget and was hampered by wartime shortages, but his conception of the material overcame all obstacles. It was a triumphant cinematic masterpiece, nominated for the Academy Award as Best Picture and Olivier as Best Actor.

He followed it with *Hamlet* in 1948, *Richard III* in 1955, and *Othello* in 1965. Each subsequent film had glimpses of the genius displayed in *Henry V*, and each was critically acclaimed. Olivier's success opened the door for another director/actor to obtain financing for his vision of a Shakespearean play.

Orson Welles was something of a rogue filmmaker having caused a great sensation in 1940 with *Citizen Kane*. By 1948 he had a mixed bag of films, either as an actor or director, to his credit, but he was not considered a major talent by most studios.



"RICHARD III" (1955)
Laurence Olivier

PHOTOFEST



"MACBETH" (1948)
Orson Welles

PHOTOFEST

Herbert Yates, the mogul of Republic Pictures, was trying to upgrade the quality of movie produced at his studio. He wanted to reduce the number of B movies and increase the number of A productions at Republic.

Welles convinced Yates that a Shakespearean movie would bring prestige to the small studio. Welles wanted to film *Macbeth* and Yates was willing to provide a medium sized budget for the project. Welles agreed to the budget and a shooting schedule of twenty-one days. Welles starred and directed a cast that included Jeanette Nolan as Lady Macbeth with Roddy McDowall, Robert Coote, Edgar Barrier, and Dan O'Herlihy. The film has touches of Welles' genius, but the overall result is disappointing and the low budget spoiled an earnest attempt at filming the play.

The film did poorly at the box office and Welles retreated to Europe for his next Shakespearean project. He began shooting *Othello* in 1951 in France and ran out

of funds several times, but was able to re-assemble his cast at different locations and finally finished the picture. It was panned by critics and failed miserably at the box office. The experience nearly bankrupted Welles and made producers leery of letting him direct again.

Welles wasn't the only individual to lose money because of a love of the Bard and it is certain others will risk huge sums gambling on their versions of Shakespeare's works.

Still others have used the plays as the basis for every kind of movie from science fiction (*Forbidden Planet* is a rip-off of *The Tempest*) to sex comedies (Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*). The themes of Shakespeare's plays are universal and his characters rich in their complexity.

Let us hope there will always be motion picture producers, directors and actors to accept the challenge of a Shakespearean play and that there will always be audiences to savor mankind's greatest playwright. ■



Museum of Broadcast Communications

museum pieces

Reported by Margaret Warren

Pick out the second Sunday of most any month and wander into the Radio Hall of Fame studio at the Museum of Broadcast Communications.

There, up on the stage, are actors with scripts in hand and sound effects engineers and an announcer and a director. They are there to perform classic radio programs like *The Bickersons*, *The Great Gildersleeve* or *The Jack Benny Program* — all the great ones. Just like in

the old days. The difference is this is 1997 and not 1947 and this "broadcast" is for the in-studio audience alone.

They are the *Those Were The Days Radio Players*, a troop of radio fans drawn from all over Chicagoland who banded together five years ago to re-create the sounds and excitement of radio's Golden Age. By day, most of these players are office workers, sales people, teachers, students, professionals, and retirees. Their compensation is simply the love of performing and sharing the memories.

It all started in 1991 when Tom Tirpak, then a student at the University of Illinois, approached Chuck Schaden with an idea. Tom had discovered vintage radio and had organized a group of appreciators on campus in Urbana. So why not the big city? Early in 1992, Chuck put out the word to his Saturday afternoon listeners: Anyone interested? Come join us! More than 100 would-be Don



Wilsons, Fibber McGees, Henry Aldrichs and Mary Livingstones, along with hopeful engineers and directors showed up at that first meeting. From that has grown seven groups spread throughout the metropolitan area.

Each group takes its turn performing at the Museum. They often take their show on the road, playing to audiences in libraries, retirement communities and historical societies.

Circle your calendar. The next reenactment at the Museum is April 13. After that it's May 4 (first Sunday), then June 8, July 13, August 10 and the second Sunday of the month for the rest of the year! The Museum opens at Noon on Sunday. Doors to the Radio Hall of Fame studio open at 1:30 and the program begins at 2 p.m. All performances are free of charge.

Drop in anytime and say Happy 5th Birthday to the *Those Were The Days Radio Players!*

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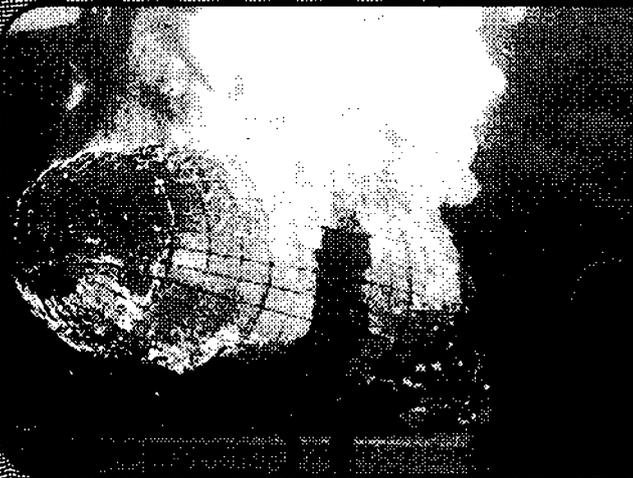
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BUCK ROGERS

By Ed Knapp
Page 2

RADIOS WITH SOUL

By W. Gardner Kissack
Page 9

THE PLAY'S THING

By Bob Kolososki
Page 36

RADIO SLANG

By Richard W. O'Donnell
Page 7

AUSTIN HIGH

By Ken Alexander
Page 13

MUSEUM PIECES

By Margaret Warren
Page 40

WE GET LETTERS

Our Readers Write
Page 18

PLUS WNIB *THOSE WERE THE DAYS* LISTINGS Pages 20-24
WMAQ *WHEN RADIO WAS* CALENDAR Page 25