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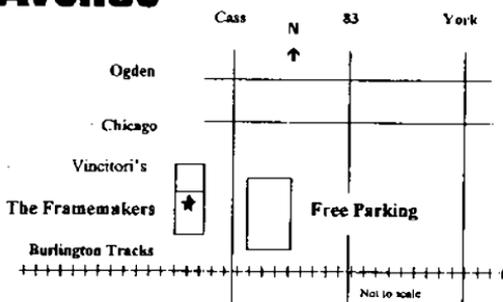
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Why I Love Jack Benny

BY KAREN HUGHES

It was night. I was curled up in the backseat of the car, trying to fall asleep as four-year-olds are wont to do at the end of a long weekend visiting Grandma. Sleep seemed somehow less interesting than the voices coming from the car's tape player, however.

A nasal man with an exaggerated French accent was singing along to a scratchy violin: "Play it softly, play it tender. Where can I go to surrender?" This was funny. Then came the second verse: "You should sound like birdies chirping; you sound like a horse that's burping." I was horrified. Horses burping? How could my parents listen to such filth?!

This is the earliest memory I have of listening to Jack Benny. Of course, my disgust quickly gave way to hero-worship, which, I am proud to say, is still going strong 16 years later and happily shows no signs of waning. But why has Jack Benny been such an idol to someone of my generation? Why does a modern-day college student feel so strongly about some guy who died a



Professor LeBlanc (Mel Blanc) and Jack Benny

decade before she was born? How has his genius managed to survive for so long?

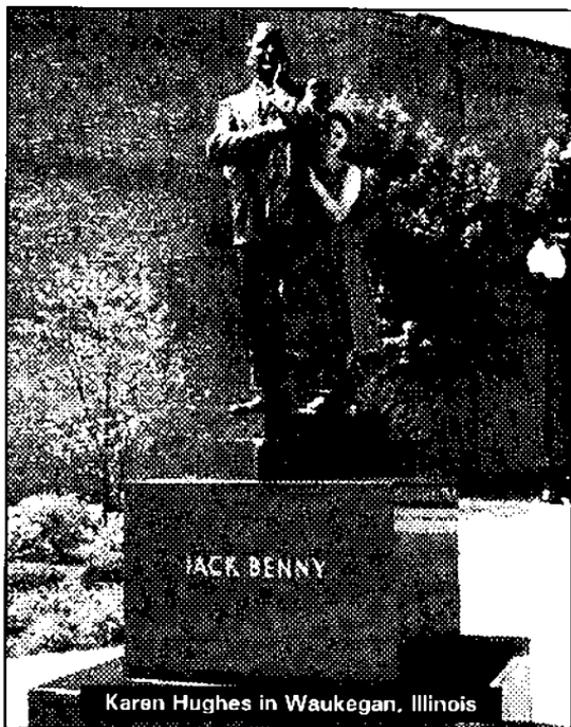
My father teaches radio broadcasting. He has always been interested in old-time radio, and I grew up listening to all of the wonderful shows. While other parents read fairy tales to their children at bedtime, Daddy read me *Vic and Sade* scripts. I loved all of the programs, but *The Jack Benny Show* has always been my favorite. Perhaps it is the warmth of his voice and the gentleness of his self-deprecating humor. Listening to his show, you somehow know that he must

Karen Hughes is a student at the University of Illinois and a lifelong fan of Jack Benny.

have been a truly good person.

It has been said many a time that the genius of Jack Benny's comedy was his willingness to be the butt of jokes. Every listener can identify with his anti-heroism, and this helped make his appeal so widespread. I personally love his humor so much because it's obvious that *he's* enjoying it as well. It's wonderful to observe someone doing something he or she really loves, and that is precisely what every listener has the privilege of doing when turning on one of Jack Benny's shows. It's as though he is eagerly saying, "Come share this laughter with me! I'm having a great time; please join me!" His joy and enthusiasm spill through the microphone, through the tape player, through the decades into our delighted ears and imaginations.

But the real reason I love Jack Benny so much has nothing to do with his comedy. I love this man — and I think I can use the strong term "love" legitimately and without exaggeration because he was simply a gentle, wonderful human being. Perhaps that is a rather

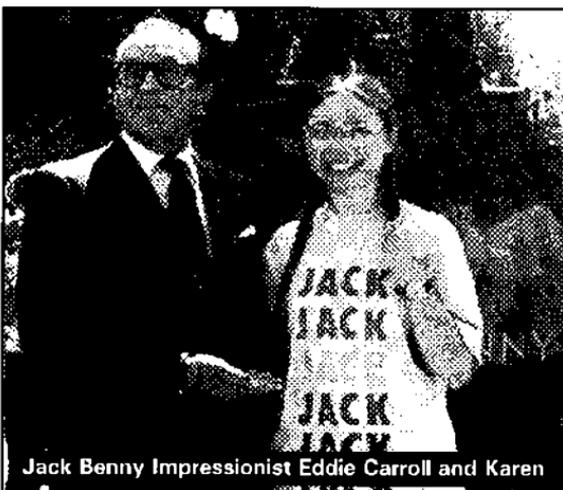


Karen Hughes in Waukegan, Illinois

bold claim coming from someone who never met him; indeed, someone who was born ten years after he passed away. True, I have only read books about him and listened to his show, as thousands of others have done.

But how can readers enjoy any of the warm biographies written by those closest to him and not feel as though they've just spent a few hours with the delightful man himself? His personality shines through the printed words, and the obvious love of the authors of all of the books fairly radiates from their pages. Jack Benny graciously allows his friends and family to share a little part of him with us every time we open one of these books, and their loving words are reinforced by the warmth and happiness we hear in his voice every time we listen to his show.

Ever since I discovered the



Jack Benny Impressionist Eddie Carroll and Karen

brilliance that is Jack Benny, I have been trying to share my enthusiasm with my peers. It is important for people my age and younger to learn about and appreciate all of the old-time radio shows. Helping the stars achieve immortality is a small way to show our gratitude for the happiness they've given us over the years.

I am proud to say that every single person in my high school graduating class at least knows who Jack Benny is. True, there were only 59 of us, but it's a start. I remember once during my freshman year, I mentioned Jack Benny in one of my classes. The boy next to me frowned and asked, "Who's Jack Benny?" Immediately the rest of the class released a collective gasp and turned to stare at him. Bewildered by such a reaction, he asked, "What, was he one of the Beatles or something?" By the end of the period, he knew more about Jack Benny than he ever wanted to know.

Some of the happiest moments of my life are when people my age come up to me and excitedly tell me they've seen a reference to Jack Benny somewhere. It makes me feel good to know that even if they're not becoming ardent radio enthusiasts, at least they recognize references to what I believe is a very significant part of American history. Perhaps this sounds grandiose, but I will continue my quest to spread old-time radio to everyone around me as long as I am capable of expressing the love that I have for the shows and especially for this one particular star.

Why do I love Jack Benny? He was a kind, gentle man who devoted his life to doing what he loved. He was a comic genius, and he is my hero. And, I have to admit, the line about horses burping is pretty funny. ■

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King of the Cowboys

BY WAYNE W. DANIEL

Seventy years ago, in 1934, a young Gene Autry arrived in Hollywood to sing in a Ken Maynard movie titled "In Old Santa Fe" and unwittingly set the stage for

the emergence of the singing cowboy as a recognized figure in the realm of popular culture. While Autry was the first successful singing cowboy, others followed in his wake, including Tex Ritter, Eddic Dean, Rex Allen, and tenor-voiced, guitar-strumming Roy Rogers, destined to become the King of the Cowboys. It was also

in 1934 that a vocal trio performing cowboy songs on a radio station in Hollywood, California, was christened "The Sons of the Pioneers." The future Roy Rogers was a member of this group.

Roy Rogers was born Leonard Franklin

Wayne W. Daniel of Chamblee, Georgia, is a retired college professor and a country music historian. He is the author of Pickin' on Pcachtree, A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia, published by the University of Illinois Press.

Sly on November 5, 1911, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was the third and only boy of four children born to Andrew and Mattie Sly. Andrew Sly, a native of Ohio, earned

a living as a shoe factory employee, while his wife, a Kentuckian, kept house and looked after the children. Andrew Sly was an adventurous and innovative man. Prior to his son's birth, it is reputed that, among other jobs, he had worked as an acrobat, a carnival laborer, and a showboat entertainer. Be-



Roy Rogers and Trigger

fore Leonard was a year old, the elder Sly, with the help of a relative, built a houseboat that he ferried up the Ohio River from Cincinnati to Portsmouth, 120 miles away. The Sly family lived on the houseboat for seven years before moving twelve miles north up the Scioto River from Portsmouth. Here, in a small rural community called Duck Run, the Slys built a house on land that Andrew had bought with money saved from his shoe factory earnings.

For the next ten years Leonard Sly experienced the adventures, delights, and

hardships of growing up on a hard-scrabble farm. He learned to plow the fields to grow food for his family; to hunt with rifle, bow, and slingshot; and to love and train wild animals. There was also the matter of getting a formal education. "I only got a couple of years of high school," he once told a radio interviewer. Schooling had to be scuttled in favor of survival, and at the age of seventeen, Leonard went to work to help support the family.

Farming for the Slys was not an economic success. Life on the farm did, however, provide young Leonard with an opportunity to learn to ride a horse, a skill that proved to be an asset in his future career. "The first 'horse' I had was a mule," he joked years later. "I learned to ride horses on a mule when I was about seven years old, and later my dad bought me a little ex-sulky racer, and she was my pride and joy."

While the Sly family's daily routine may have been grueling, they found respite in their music. "I played mandolin and guitar, which I learned when I was a kid," Leonard explained after he had become Roy Rogers. "My mother and dad both played them for square dances when we were kids, and my three sisters and I all learned to play the mandolin and guitar. Because you weren't distracted by a lot of radio and television and stuff like that in those days you had to manufacture your own entertainment. I bought my first guitar in a hock shop ... in Cincinnati. I paid 20 dollars for it." Leonard, who attended the dances with his parents, became a proficient square-dance caller, an accomplishment that he put to good use in later years.

Yodeling was another skill developed during his Duck Run days that Leonard



Dale Evans and Roy Rogers

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later capitalized on as a professional entertainer. He perfected his technique by using yodeling as a method of response when his mother called him from play and other farmyard activities.

In the summer of 1930, when Leonard was 18 years old, the Sly family packed what belongings they could into their 1923 Dodge and set out for California. Awaiting them at journey's end were manual labor and the migrant worker camps vividly described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, published nine years later. After four months in the Golden State, during which time Leonard and his father worked primarily as truck drivers hauling gravel to build a golf course, the elder Sly decided it was time to return to Ohio. Leonard, who had fallen in love with California, was a reluctant passenger on the trip back east.

The following year, motivated by the prospect of another cold Ohio winter, he found it easy to take advantage of an opportunity to return to California, which

henceforth would be his permanent home. The elder Slys soon followed their son west, and father and son again found employment hauling gravel. When these jobs proved to be short-lived, the family became genuine migrant workers.

In *Happy Trails*, the book he co-wrote with Dale Evans, Roy Rogers stated that he and his relatives "picked peaches in Bakersfield for Del Monte and grapes and everything else for anybody else who would hire us. ... When one job finished we would load the family up in our battered old truck and make camp with a whole bunch of other poor strangers near another orchard that needed picking."

Once again music provided the means by which Leonard Sly could temporarily escape the drudgery of earning a living by the sweat of his brow. When the day's quota of fruit had been gathered, he and his father would bring out their instruments and treat their fellow workers to some down-home picking and singing. It soon occurred to young Leonard that perhaps he could parlay his musical talents into a means of earning a living. The life of a professional musician would surely be easier than that of a migrant worker. Turning thought into action, Leonard, in 1931, teamed up with a cousin, Stanley Sly, to form a duet they called the Slye Brothers.

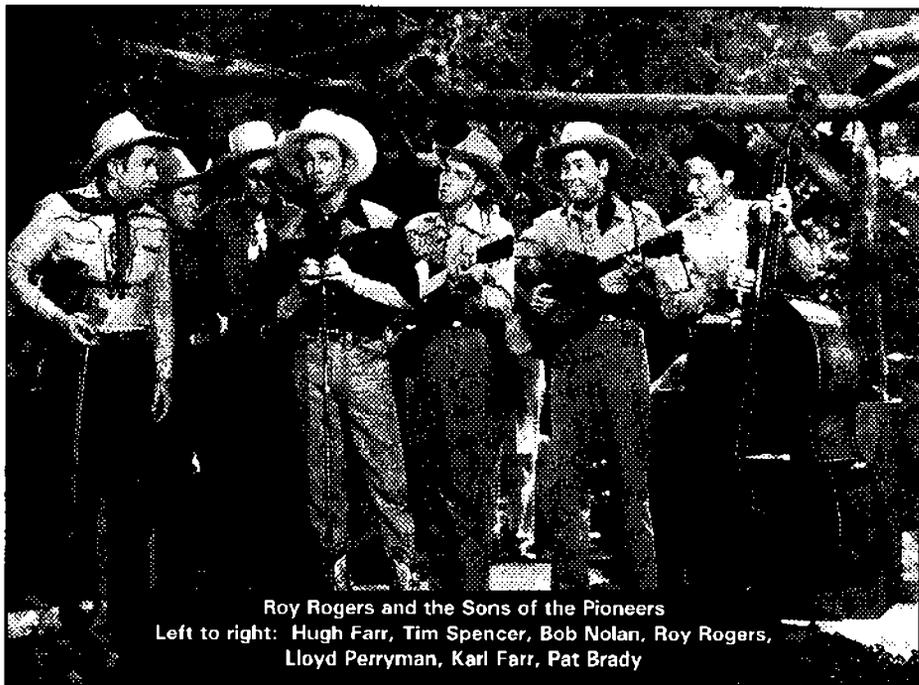
They began performing wherever an audience could be found – at parties, square dances, and other social gatherings. Procuring and fulfilling commitments to these gigs proved to be more arduous than anticipated, and their pay, usually obtained by passing the hat, was not sufficient to allow them to give up their day jobs. The cousin soon fell by the wayside, but Leonard persevered. Over the next three years he performed with several groups until, in 1934, his career stabilized with the formation of a trio that

became known as the Sons of the Pioneers.

Leonard Sly's journey leading to the fame and fortune achieved by the Sons of the Pioneers was by way of the proverbial rocky road. After the demise of the Slye Brothers duo, he took a job with a group called Uncle Tom Murray's Hillbillies, for whom he worked without pay just to gain additional experience as a performer.

About this time, his sister talked him into making an appearance on an amateur show broadcast on a small radio station from midnight to six in the morning. "I played some old hillbilly songs for them," he wrote in *Happy Trails*. "I guess they liked me enough because they applauded pretty good and the people at the radio station took my name down before I left." Among the listeners that night was the manager of a band in need of a singer. "A couple or three days later," Roy Rogers told Los Angeles disc jockey Dick Haynes, "I got a call from an old boy [who] wanted me to join the Rocky Mountaineers. They were all musicians. None of them sang. They were older fellows." Leonard sang lead with the group, but he wanted to do more. "So I talked them into putting an ad in the paper to get another fellow [so] that we could work out some duets together," he recalled.

Bob Nolan, a lifeguard at Santa Monica beach, saw the ad and rode a streetcar to the end of the line and walked the rest of the way out to East Los Angeles to apply for the job. "I'll never forget when he knocked on the door," Roy told Dick Haynes, "He had his shoes in his hand. He'd bought a new pair of shoes, and he had blisters on both of his heels about the size of a dime." Although Leonard and Bob harmonized well as a duet, Leonard felt that they would sound even better by adding another voice to form a trio. Bob Nolan persuaded a friend, Bill "Slumber" Nichols, to join them.



Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers

Left to right: Hugh Farr, Tim Spencer, Bob Nolan, Roy Rogers, Lloyd Perryman, Karl Farr, Pat Brady

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Although the Rocky Mountaineers had a weekly radio program, the pay was dismal. "We couldn't quite make it with the Rocky Mountaineers," Roy reminisced. "We had a rough time. I got tired of living on chipped beef and gravy, and I went with another group called the International Cowboys," so named because its personnel included a Mexican and a Hawaiian. True to form, the International Cowboys was soon added to Leonard's list of previous jobs.

Undaunted, and with characteristic optimism, Leonard Sly put together another act consisting of himself; Tim Spencer, who had worked with him as a member of the Rocky Mountaineers; Bill "Slumber" Nichols; a fellow they called Cactus Mack, and a fiddler who went by the name of Cyclone. Calling themselves the O-Bar-O Cowboys, this group immediately set off on a barnstorming trip through the Southwest, traveling in a Pontiac owned by the fiddle player. As a

result of poor promotion and injudicious bookings by their agent, this two-month excursion turned out to be a disaster. "We got hungry," Roy said of the tour. "We ate all the jack rabbits and cottontails between [Los Angeles] and Roswell, New Mexico."

The end of the Southwest tour also marked the end of the O-Bar-O Cowboys, but it was not the end of Leonard Sly's quest for success as an entertainer. Back in Los Angeles, he went to work with Jack and His Texas Outlaws, a group heard on KFWB in Hollywood.

Again, finding himself working for experience rather than money, he set about trying to create a new vocal trio. "I went out to Tim [who was working as bag boy at a grocery store]," Roy told an interviewer, "and I said, 'Tim, why don't you get with me, and we'll go out and see Bob [Nolan], see if he'll be interested in coming on a better station than we'd been on before, and we'll get together and work out some trio stuff,' and so we did. We went out to

the Bel-Air Country Club and got Bob [who was employed there as a caddie].”

At first, the threesome, calling themselves the Pioneer Trio, worked at KFWB as part of the Jack and His Texas Outlaws group. An announcer started calling the trio the Sons of the Pioneers, because, he said, they were too young to be pioneers themselves. As their popularity grew, the station manager asked the trio to start working on the station as an independent act at a salary of \$35 a week. The trio had two programs on KFWB, a morning show on which they were billed as the Gold Star Rangers and an evening program where they were known as the Sons of the Pioneers.

In the spring of 1934, Texas fiddler and bass singer Hugh Farr became the fourth member of the Sons of the Pioneers, and the group found themselves caught up in a heady swirl of success. The following August found the quartet in the Los Angeles studios of Decca Records, where they recorded, among other selections, the Bob Nolan composition, “Tumbling Tumbleweeds,” a song destined to become an immediate hit and a western classic. By the end of the year the Sons of the Pioneers had begun recording for the Standard Radio company a series of transcriptions that would be syndicated to radio stations all across the country.

Major events for the group in 1935 were the addition of singer/guitarist Karl Farr, brother of Hugh, and the beginning of a long stint of appearances in western movies. In 1936 the Sons of the Pioneers was a featured act at the Texas Centennial in Dallas, and a San Francisco firm published *The Sons of the Pioneers Song Folio #1*, containing such popular Bob Nolan compositions as “Way Out There,” “Happy Cowboy,” “Sky Ball Paint,” and “Echoes from the Hills.” The Sons of the Pioneers were enjoying the first fruits of a

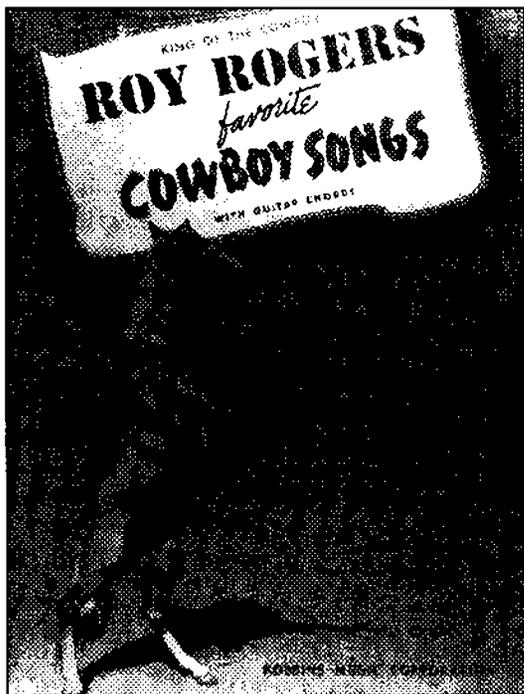
successful career that would still be active 70 years later.

While Leonard Sly was enjoying the current and anticipated future success of the Sons of the Pioneers, he was open to the exploration of opportunities to further his career as an entertainer. When he heard that Republic Studios was looking for a singing cowboy to replace Gene Autry, with whom they were in a contract dispute, Leonard successfully auditioned for the job.

On October 13, 1937, after negotiating a release from Columbia, the motion picture company for which he had been working as a member of the Sons of the Pioneers, Leonard Sly signed a contract with Republic. Executives at Republic felt that Leonard Slye (Leonard had added the letter “e” to his last name sometime earlier) was not a name that would make a positive contribution to the cowboy hero image they wished to create for their new property. Even Dick Weston, a name Leonard had been using for his minor film appearances since 1935, was nixed by the studio bigwigs. The name Roy Rogers, on the other hand, seemed like a winner. It was alliterative, short, and reminiscent of the recently deceased entertainment icon Will Rogers.

And so it was that Roy Rogers made his starring debut in the Republic film *Under Western Stars*, released in the spring of 1938. This movie cast Roy as a young cowboy wishing to free local ranchers from the oppressive acts of the company that controlled their water supply. He achieves his goal by successfully running against the area’s United States congressman who was beholden to the head of the greedy water company. Roy pleads his case before his fellow congressmen in Washington and succeeds in bringing relief to his neighbor ranchers.

In its initial efforts to make Roy Rogers



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the next singing cowboy sensation, Republic Studios encountered a few problems. First off, according to the entertainment weekly *Variety*, Smiley Burnette, longtime Gene Autry sidekick, asked the studio for release from his contract. The reported reason was Burnette's objection to being cast in support of Roy Rogers.

Next came a telegram from Gene Autry's lawyer stating that his client held the copyright to the song "Dust" that Roy had sung in the recently released *Under Western Stars*. Republic Studios, according to the wire, had no rights with regard to the song.

Then in August, Republic heard from yet another lawyer. This one represented a 33-year veteran of vaudeville, whose name also happened to be Roy Rogers. Contending that his name was being capitalized on by the studio, this Roy Rogers was suing Republic and the new Roy Rogers for \$150,000 and a restraining

order to prevent further use of the name by the studio's rising star.

In due time the studio's problems were resolved. *Billy the Kid Returns*, released in September of 1938, was Smiley Burnette's second and last movie with Roy until 1942, when Gene Autry's military duties left his sidekick in need of a job. The song "Dust" remained in *Under Western Stars*, was recorded by Roy in 1938, and re-released on the long-play album *Roy Rogers: Columbia Historic Edition* in 1984. The suit brought by the first Roy Rogers was settled out of court for \$12,000 (approximately \$160,000 in today's dollars).

Republic Studios shifted into overdrive in its efforts to catapult Roy Rogers into the upper echelons of B western singing cowboy stardom. By the end of 1938, Roy had three more movies under his belt: *Billy the Kid Returns*, *Come On Rangers*, and *Shine On Harvest Moon*, released, respectively, in September, November, and December.

He starred in eight films in 1939. Studio executives arranged grueling personal appearance tours for their new star, timed to coincide with the release of his movies and to showcase his talents in theaters where his films were shown. As the filming of *Under Western Stars* drew to a close, for example, the studio was busy lining up personal appearances in Dallas, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Memphis, New York City, and Chicago.

The premiere of *Under Western Stars* at the Capitol Theater in Dallas on Wednesday, April 13, 1938, was a gala affair that kept the stars of the film in the city for eight days. Roy and Smiley Burnette, arriving in Dallas by train on the 13th, were met by a contingent of Boy Scouts and fangercettes who accompanied them in

a parade from the station to City Hall for an official welcome by the mayor. That evening at the Capitol Theater, Roy and Burnette, accompanied by the Sons of the Pioneers, gave two live performances sandwiched between showings of the movie. According to a newspaper report, they "went over big" before a standing-room-only crowd that "backed up out into the street."

Next day, the stars were at the Baker Hotel, where they were honored at a luncheon given by Republic Studios and attended by local officials and movie industry executives. During the succeeding seven-day run of the movie, Roy and Burnette gave five performances daily at the theater. On Sunday, April 17, they managed to work in a visit to the studios of Dallas' WFAA, where they were guests on a musical variety program broadcast over the regional Dixie Network.

While movie critics frequently found fault with the plots, their comments about Roy were generally favorable. The morning after *Under Western Stars* opened at the Criterion Theater on Broadway, a *New York Times* reviewer, comparing the film's star to then currently popular entertainment figures, reported that Roy had "a drawl like Gary Cooper, a smile like Shirley Temple and a voice like Tito Guizar."

In its review of *Billy the Kid Returns*, a writer for *Variety* stated that "Surrounded by production, songs, reams of action and fine support, Rogers makes a definite mark in the westerns field, and should also, if comparably handled in succeeding films, outshine most of the herd. He has the added advantage of femme appeal as well as those of action-hungry boys."

Roy Rogers' appearances on stage were well received. *Billboard* magazine, reporting on his show at a Lincoln, Nebraska, theater in November 1938,

stated that his "act goes swell with the kids, and he lopes off, having made a swell impression." In December he broke the house record at the Palace Theater in Minneapolis, when, over a period of two days, approximately 10,000 fans paid to see him perform.

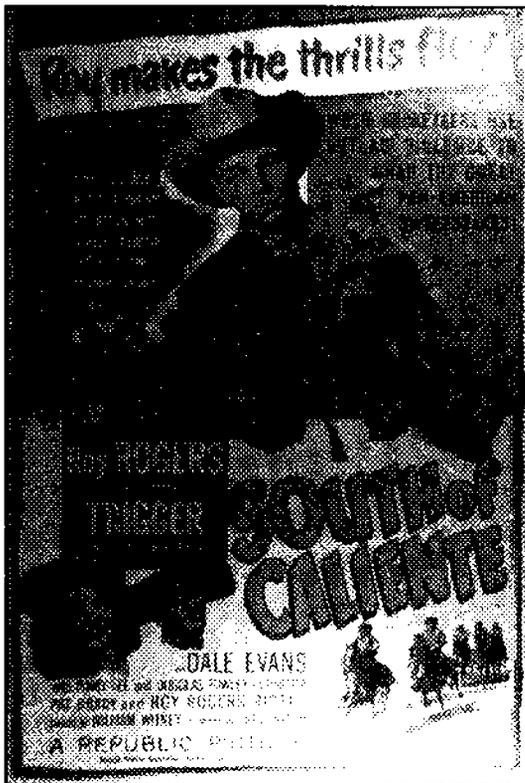
The *Billboard* reviewer who caught his act in Natchez, Mississippi, in July 1939 reported that "Rogers, handsome and rugged, thrilled large audiences with songs and guitar strumming, accompanied by members of [his] entourage." Roy would go on to star in a total of 81 western films and make guest appearances in some dozen other movies.

When Smiley Burnette opted out of performing with Roy, the new kid on the Republic Studios lot was left in need of a sidekick, that essential element of the B western. Veteran character actor Raymond Hatton filled the bill in three of Roy's next four movies. Roy's best-remembered movie sidekick, George "Gabby" Hayes, joined him on his seventh movie, *Southward Ho!*, released in May 1939, lending his unique comedic talents to forty more Roy Rogers films.

Although those "action-hungry boys," who made up a healthy chunk of the B western audience, would never stand for mushy romance scenes, producers felt a need to include a woman in their movies' cast of characters. Many a plot revolved around a widow or marriageable-age female orphan in need of rescue or protection by the hero.

More than 20 women appeared in Roy Rogers movies before Dale Evans appeared on the scene in 1944 for a role in *The Cowboy and the Senorita*, Roy's 40th film. She would be his leading lady in a total of 28 movies.

Dale Evans soon became Roy Rogers' leading lady in real life as well. They were married on December 31, 1947, in a



WAYNE DANIEL COLLECTION

private ceremony at the home of friends in Davis, Oklahoma.

This was Roy's third marriage. His first wife was Lucile Ascolese, whom he had married in 1933 just before leaving on the Southwest tour with the O-Bar-O Cowboys. The Rogers' divorce, which had been granted in 1935, became final on June 8, 1936, following the year-long wait required by California law.

On June 11, 1936, Roy and Arlene Wilkins were married in Roswell, New Mexico. Arlene died on November 3, 1946, from complications of childbirth, six days after Roy Rogers, Jr., was born. Roy and Arlene had two other children, Cheryl Darlene, whom they adopted in 1941, and Linda Lou, who had been born to them in 1943.

Roy and Dale had one child, Robin Elizabeth, who was born in 1950. They

adopted two girls, a part Choctaw Indian named Mary Little Doe (called Dodie) and a Korean named Deborah Lee, and a boy, John David "Sandy" Hardy. A foster child, Marion Fleming, a Scottish orphan, was a part of their family. Dale had a son, Thomas Frederick Fox, Jr., by a previous marriage. In 1974 Roy told disc jockey Dick Haynes that "[Dale] loves children, and I do, too; and by having a big family and working together ... makes our family nice. Like all families," Roy continued, "we had our share of tragedies. We lost three of [our children]. Lost a boy [Sandy] in the service in Germany, and our little girl, little Korean girl, was killed in our church bus accident coming back from Tijuana." The Rogers' daughter, Robin, about whom Dale wrote a book titled *Angel Unaware*, died when she was two years old.

During her short life, she had suffered from Down's syndrome and other medical problems.

Roy and Dale depended on their faith to see them through the dark hours of their marriage. "I don't think we would have ever made it without our spiritual life," Roy told an *Atlanta Constitution* staff writer in 1978. In 1950 Dale participated in evangelist Billy Graham's Crusades in Houston, New York, San Diego, and Washington. Both Roy and Dale became active members of the Billy Graham Crusades in 1954 and continued in this capacity, off and on, into the 1990s.

Religion was also an important factor in the Rogers' private lives. They were instrumental in organizing the Hollywood Christian Group. "We had a lot of people in the motion picture business, and we'd meet every week and have prayer," Roy

said. "People would talk and give their testimony."

Once Dale Evans appeared on the scene, the story of Roy Rogers became the story of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Roy, billed as the King of the Cowboys, and Dale, dubbed the Queen of the West, became the most recognizable symbols of the West as portrayed by Hollywood and the popular entertainment industry. Their presence in the field of show business became pervasive. Not only were they



Roy Rogers and Dale Evans

PHOTOFEST

the top money makers in the B western field, Roy and Dale garnered recognition as stars of stage, radio, records, rodeo, and television.

Roy's network radio career began on November 21, 1944, when the *Roy Rogers Show* made its first appearance as a weekly Mutual Broadcasting System offering. According to advance publicity the shows were "Designed to recapture in song and story the romance of the Old West." They followed a format similar to the *Gene Autry Melody Ranch* programs, with which radio listeners had long been familiar. Each program contained a dose of comedy, a dramatic skit, and music and songs by Roy and the Sons of the Pioneers. This series of radio programs ended prematurely after only six months on the air when Roy's military draft status became 1-A. Roy did not have to go into service, and on October 5, 1946, the *Roy Rogers Show* was back on the air, this time on Saturday nights on the NBC network. This program replaced the *National Barn Dance*, which had been a regular NBC Saturday night show originating in Chicago since 1933.

Since the stars of the Roy Rogers Show

were based in Hollywood, production of this segment of NBC's broadcast schedule moved to the West Coast. *Variety's* reviewer of the first Saturday night Roy Rogers Show thought it was "solid fare throughout" and "could probably please urbanites if they were to listen." Roy opened the program with "There's a New Moon Over My Shoulder"; Dale sang "On the Alamo"; the Sons of the Pioneers, according to *Variety*, "fill[ed] in pleasantly with waddy tunes; Gabby Hayes provided the comedy; and Pat Buttram, the only performer who made the transition from the *National Barn Dance* to Roy's show, appeared as a sheepherder in the dramatic interlude. In summary, the *Variety* reviewer thought the show had "good pace and direction." *The Roy Rogers Show*, occupying various time slots on the NBC and Mutual networks, remained on the air through July 1955.

When radio gave way to television as the main home entertainment medium, Roy and Dale quickly seized the opportunity to use this new technology to bring the *Roy Rogers Show* into the homes of their fans. Between December 31, 1951, and June 9, 1957, NBC presented

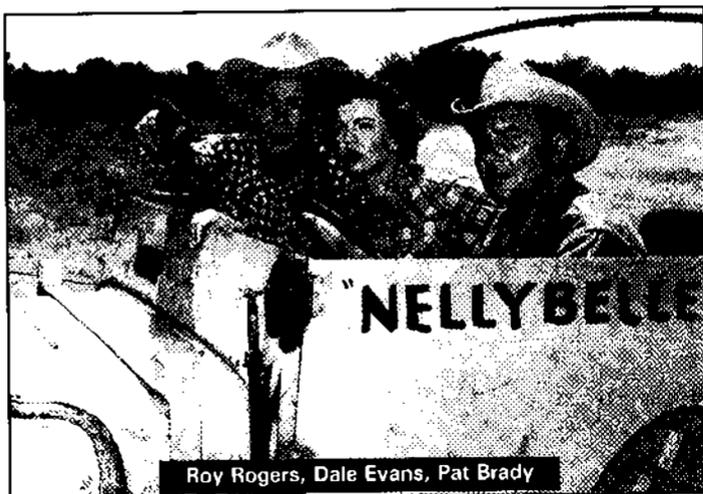
100 weekly episodes of the show. These were the years when Americans thrilled at Roy's heroic deeds; admired Dale's beauty and spunk; laughed at Pat Brady and his unpredictable jeep, Nellybelle; learned to hum the show's theme song, "Happy Trails", and dreamed of owning a horse like Trigger or Dale's steed, Buttermilk, and a dog like Roy's German Shepherd, Bullet. During the early 1960s the show was seen on the CBS television network, after which it went into syndication.

Roy Rogers fans found excitement in his movies and enjoyed listening to him on records and radio, but the greatest thrill of all was seeing him in person. And his agents, promoters, and managers sought to provide as many opportunities as possible for that to happen. Movies needed to be promoted through personal appearances, and Roy's image as an authentic cowboy had to be enhanced with rodeo performances.

A big break for Roy in his rodeo career occurred in October 1943, when he starred in the World's Championship Rodeo in New York City's Madison Square Garden. Gene Autry had been the star of this extravaganza the two preceding years, but his military duties forced him to forgo the gig in '43. *Billboard* reported that the 15,000 capacity arena was full, except for a few seats, when Roy appeared on opening day, "making the largest first-show crowd ever to witness the October fixture." Roy's show, one of 15 events on the pro-

gram, was titled "Home on the Range," and featured the star singing and yodeling a "bagful of cowboy melodies" accompanied by the Sons of the Pioneers consisting of Tim Spencer, Hugh and Karl Farr, Lloyd Perryman, and Bob Nolan. Roy, described by *Billboard* as "slim [and] well set up with nice if Hollywoodish wardrobe," also did the calling in another event, labeled "Gay Nineties Square Dance." In 1943, *Newsweek* reported that, in addition to his rodeo performances, Roy was making about 50 stage appearances a year.

For the next 15 years the life of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans would be a succession of rodeo appearances, stage performances, recording sessions, and starring roles and guest appearances on television shows and in motion pictures. For his efforts Roy would become one of the best-known and most-admired of the singing cowboys. Movie box office receipts revealed that he was America's number-one cowboy star from 1943 to 1954. In 1976, Roy and Dale were inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. Roy was inducted into Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame twice, first in 1980, as a member of the



Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Pat Brady

PHOTOFEET

original Sons of the Pioneers, and again in 1988, as an individual performer.

While Roy was riding the crest of his popularity, the public on which his popularity depended was losing interest in the storied West that had been described so eloquently in song by minstrels like Gene Autry and the Sons of the Pioneers, and in prose by such novelists as Zane Grey and Max Brand. In his book *Singing in the Saddle*, Douglas B. Green writes that by the mid-1940s Gene Autry was more interested in recording country songs than western songs, because the latter did not "sell well on phonograph records." The last singing cowboy movie, *The Phantom Stallion*, starring Rex Allen, was released in 1954. That year also saw the release of the last non-musical B western, *Two Guns and a Badge*, featuring Wayne Morris.

By 1962, writers and industry moguls had dropped the word "western" from "country-western", a term once designating a genre that lumped into a single category the mountain ballads of Roy Acuff and the cowboy songs of Roy Rogers. Western shows had all but disappeared from prime-time television by the early 1980s.

Roy Rogers was not one to sit idly by when opportunities to perform began to wane. He could always indulge his numerous hobbies that included bowling, hunting, fishing, and motorcycle riding. There were also his business interests to be attended to. Most visible of these were the Roy Rogers Family Restaurants, which by 1990 had grown in number to more than 700.

Perhaps Roy's most enjoyable activity during his later years was his involvement with the Roy Rogers Museum, which opened in 1967 in Apple Valley, California. In 1976, Roy moved the museum to Victorville, California, and renamed it the Roy

Rogers and Dale Evans Museum.

The museum moved again in 2003, this time to Branson, Missouri, a city known as "The Live Music Show Capital of the World." In the book *Happy Trails*, Roy wrote that he hoped the museum would "be a place for people to come have fun and learn about our lives, and also to remember what America was like not so many years ago." Visitors to the museum will see such items as the automobile in which the Sly family made the trip from Ohio to California, Roy and Dale's costumes, Rogers family household furnishings, and Roy's long-time pal and steed, Trigger, mounted in the life-like rearing position imprinted on the memories of senior citizens who, as children, saw him in movies and on television.

Daily performances by Roy "Dusty" Rogers, Jr., and occasional performances by other members of the family, help keep the Rogers musical legacy alive. Visitors to Branson, Missouri, can also visit the nearby Sons of the Pioneers Theater and hear the current edition of the Pioneers singing the songs that the original trio, consisting of Roy Rogers, Tim Spencer, and Bob Nolan, were singing back in 1934.

Time took its inevitable toll on the lives of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and in their later years they had their share of health problems. Roy had triple bypass heart surgery in 1978, and Dale suffered a heart attack in 1992 and a stroke in 1996. Roy died on July 6, 1998, and Dale followed him in death on February 7, 2001.

Roy Rogers and Dale Evans fans can imagine the King of the Cowboys and the Queen of the West, astride Trigger and Buttermilk, leaving the stage of life and riding into an eternal sunset singing "Happy Trails." ■

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A COMMAND PERFORMANCE DICK TRACY IN B FLAT

During World War II our boys in the service were treated to most of the stateside radio programs by way of the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS).

This service to our troops was much more than a morale builder. It was a touch of home for our servicemen and women serving in Europe and the Pacific.

A team of military and civilian personnel selected the network radio broadcasts to be beamed, at first, via short wave, and then later through the shipment of transcription discs sent to military bases around the world, including our ships at sea. GI listeners heard all the big radio stars on their own comedy, mystery and dramatic programs and they heard them, more or less, on a regular, pre-programmed basis.

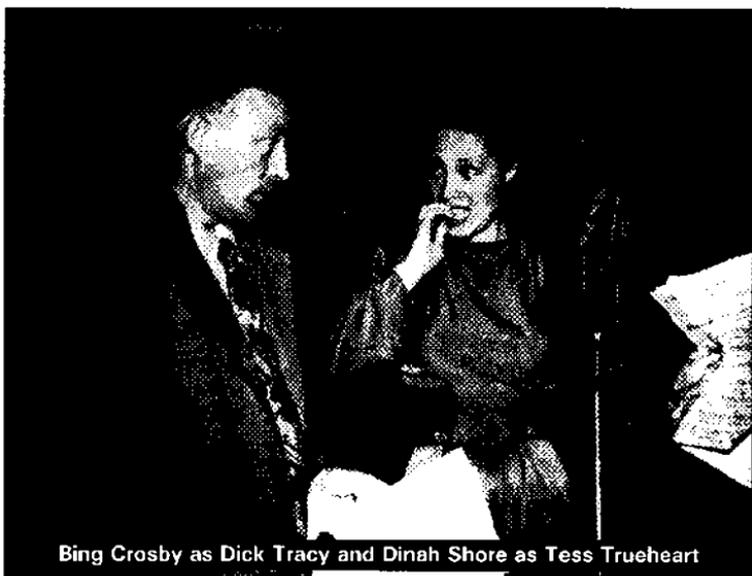


What they didn't hear, however, were all the *commercials* that usually went with those shows. Those advertising spots were *edited out* of the shows before the transcriptions were processed for military audiences. Was this censorship? Not really. The commercials were taken out mostly because military leaders felt that it was not a good idea for their troops to hear about products that the folks back home had but that were not available to GIs in a war zone. Also, the feeling was, "Why burden soldier-listeners with commercials? Let's give our boys the best entertainment we have, *advertising-free*."

And so, during all the years of World War II, the best of radio was sent from the United States to our fighting men and women around the globe.

Early on, however, it was decided that the AFRS should produce a series of special broadcasts exclusively for the troops, programs that would not be broadcast to the home folks in the 48 States.

AFRS conceived the series *Command Performance*, a weekly half-hour



Bing Crosby as Dick Tracy and Dinah Shore as Tess Trueheart



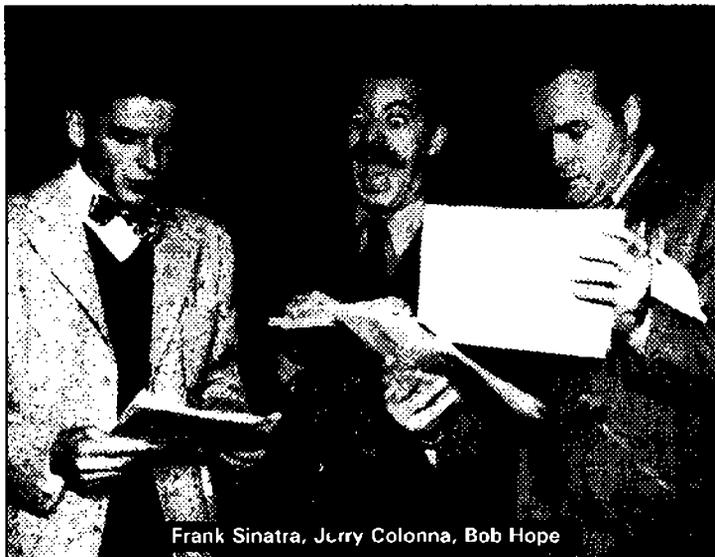
Dick Tracy in B Flat (1945)

Frank Morgan (Vitamin Flintheart), Judy Garland (Snowflake), Patty Andrews (Summer Sisters), Cass Daley (Gravel Gertie), Dinah Shore (Tess Trueheart), Bob Hope (Flattop), Jerry Colonna (Chief Brandon), Jimmy Durante (The Mole), Frank Sinatra (Shakey).

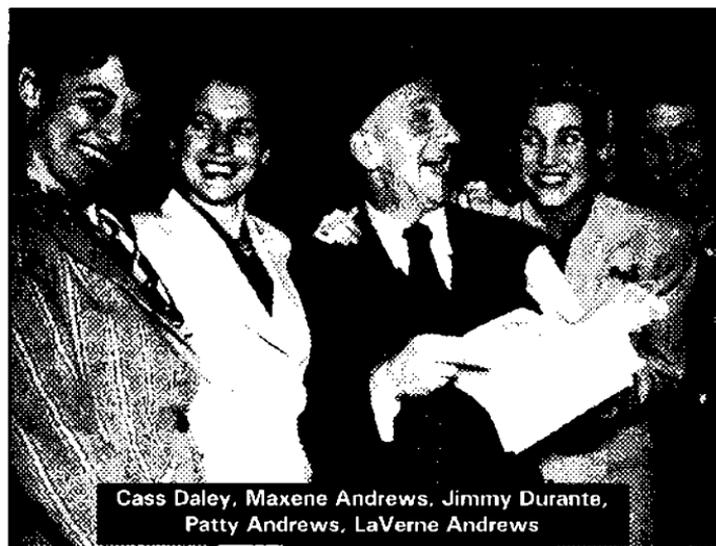
program of comedy and variety offering military audiences a star-studded lineup of the biggest talent from the entertainment world of radio and motion pictures. Movie stars, radio stars, announcers, supporting players, writers and musicians eagerly accepted the call to volunteer their services. Virtually every star in the show business galaxy appeared on the show.

The first *Command Performance* was recorded on March 1, 1942, just

about three months after Pearl Harbor. The first program in the series was emceed by Eddie Cantor and the stars included Danny Kaye, Dinah Shore, Bea Wain, Merle



Frank Sinatra, Jerry Colonna, Bob Hope



Cass Daley, Maxene Andrews, Jimmy Durante,
Patty Andrews, LaVerne Andrews

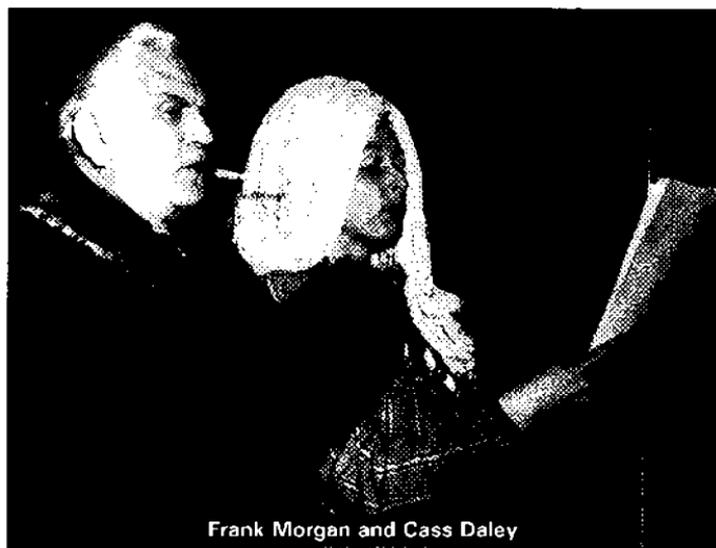
Oberon, Bert Gordon (the Mad Russian) and announcer Harry Von Zell. The show was broadcast by short-wave on March 8 and was beamed by eleven stations to Australia, Iceland, the Philippines and Ireland. Eventually the number of military stations carrying the short wave broadcasts increased to forty and by the end of the war some 440 broadcast outlets overseas were carrying the AFRS series via sixteen-inch electrical transcription discs. (By the time the war ended other for-military-audiences-

popular Chester Gould comic strip "Dick Tracy" and featured a cast that would have been impossible to get together if a producer had wanted to hire them all for the project. He simply couldn't afford it. But the stars appeared gratis as part of their contribution to the war effort. They felt their stints on *Command Performance* and other AFRS broadcasts for servicemen were the least they could do.

And so they seemed to turn out *en masse* for this particular program, called "Dick

Tracy in B Flat" written by Robert L. Welsh, Bill Morrow, Sherwood Schwartz, Frank Galin, Dick McKnight, Al Lewis, Marvin Fisher, Jack Rose and Charles Isaacs, all top radio writers of the time.

The program was a spoof of the comic strip with Bing Crosby starring as Dick Tracy, Dinah Shore as Tess Truehart, Harry Von



Frank Morgan and Cass Daley

Zell as Old Judge Hooper, Jerry Colonna as Police Chief, Bob Hope as Flat Top, Frank Morgan as Vitamin Flintheart, the Andrews Sisters as the Summer Sisters, Jimmy Durante as the Mole, Frank Sinatra as Shaky, and Cass Daley as Gravel Gertie.

Special lyrics for popular songs were provided by Jack Brooks and the music was arranged by Major Meredith Willson, conducting the Armed Forces Radio Service Orchestra.

The photos on these pages were released by AFRS to highlight this special broadcast, and were provided to the *Nostalgia Digest* by Jean Gould O'Connell, daughter of Chester Gould, creator of *Dick Tracy*. These and other photos of this program are on display - along with hundreds of items of memorabilia from the popular and long-running comic strip - at the Chester Gould Dick Tracy Museum in the Courthouse Art Center in Woodstock, Illinois. The Museum is open Thursday thru Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Call 815/338-8281. ■

TUNE IN Those Were The Days January 22 to hear "Dick Tracy in B Flat" on Command Performance.



Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland



Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra

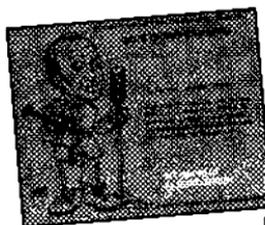


Dinah Shore, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra

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HEART AND SOUL

BY WAYNE KLATT

The only conversation I ever had with a celebrity was with retired black comic actor Stepin Fetchit (Lincoln Perry). I was working at a Chicago news service that also sent public relations releases across the country. This was in the 1960s, and CBS had just aired a documentary, *Of Black America*, implying that Stepin was a traitor to his race for playing shambling, dull-witted characters. He looked and acted like an ordinary man in his late 60s, but I could tell he was personally hurt. He had written a news release to let the world know he was just trying to do a job when there were no other film roles for African-Americans.

It's true that apart from some films for singer-actor-activist Paul Robeson, there were no starring openings for black males in mainstream American movies until the 1950s, but that void led to a strange development in several respected "white" films. Black actors and actresses were used to represent the strong values that were being lost by others. But reaching that point of reflecting the best in humanity was a long struggle.

In 1912, Fetchit ran away from his home in Key West, Florida, at the age of 14 to tour the South in "plantation shows" for black field hands, and then minstrel shows and Western carnivals. He said he adopted his name "Stepin Fetchit" from a racehorse that won him some money in Oklahoma. When he arrived in Hollywood, he had no manager but knew what producers were looking for and became the first black performer given featured billing in films with

Wayne Klatt is an editor at the City News Service and a free-lance writer.

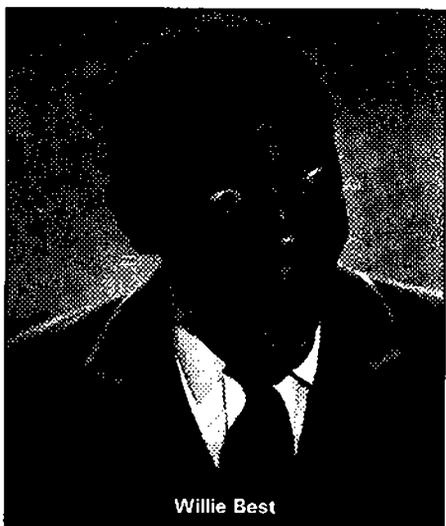


Stepin Fetchit

SPRINGLIPHOTOFEAT

major stars. At one time he owned 16 cars, including a pink Rolls Royce.

Fetchit's success in playing largely lazy rural characters encouraged the careers of black comedians Willie Best, usually a bug-eyed frightened servant, and Mantan Moreland, most remembered as Charlie Chan's chauffeur, Birmingham Brown. Despite the insensitivity of the writing,



Willie Best

PHOTOFEAT

these men were funny in their few scattered lines, and they were paid well because the studios knew they could make dry formula films entertaining.

Tap dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson wanted to perform in a dignified tuxedo, but Hollywood usually kept

him in servant clothes. Robinson could count Bob Hope, Joe DiMaggio, Irving Berlin and Duke Ellington among his friends, but the screen confined him to performing in such roles as with Shirley Temple in *The Little Colonel* and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. When he finally got to perform in a tux, his entire character was edited out of 20th Century Fox's *Cafe Metropole* (1937) even though the credits listed him as one of the stars.

Producers felt white audiences would feel uncomfortable seeing a story in which a black man succeeds. In fact, movie theater owners in the South used a razor to



Bill "Bojangles" Robinson

PHOTOFEST

cut out scenes with African-Americans in anything other than subservient roles, which is why their performances, such as songs by beautiful Lena Horne, usually seem isolated from the rest of the film. The segments were considered optional.

The "red-hot mamma" craze led by white singer Sophie Tucker in the 1920s made it easier for some female black singers to reach a wider audience by acting and gain experience for more important roles that might someday come along. Such as vaudeville singer Hattie McDaniel.

As Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, McDaniel provided ignored common sense to Scarlett O'Hara. But she couldn't cash in either on her talent or her Academy Award as best supporting actress, and for more than a decade nothing came along but small roles at best. In 1951, McDaniel took over for Ethel Waters as a problem-solving maid in the TV show *Beulah*. When asked why she had accepted such a demeaning role, she replied, "It was either playing a maid for \$5,000 a week or being one for \$50 a week." When she died in 1952 at the age of 51, the role was taken up by Louise Beavers, the maid who saved the day in the 1948 Cary Grant-Myma Loy film *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*.

Ethel Waters' trademark song, "Happi-



Mantan Moreland

PHOTOFEST



Hattie McDaniel, Olivia deHavilland, Vivien Leigh
Gone With The Wind

ness is a Thing Called Joe.” was written for her in the morality fable *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). With her sad and smoky voice, she stayed a singer longer than McDaniel, but she made her indelible impression as the only one who understands the wild tomboy Frankie (Julie Harris) in *Member of the Wedding* (1952). Waters was so religious that she insisted on having Christian lines inserted in the award-winning script, and her presence actually gives the film a stronger central base than the novel and the play had.

Mezzo-soprano Etta Moten dubbed the voices of Barbara Stanwyck (*Ladies of the Big House*) and Ginger Rogers (*Professional Sweetheart*), and stands out as she sets into motion the socially-conscious “Forgotten Man” number in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Moten went on to become the first African-American to sing at the White House, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt asked her to perform “Forgotten Man” for him.

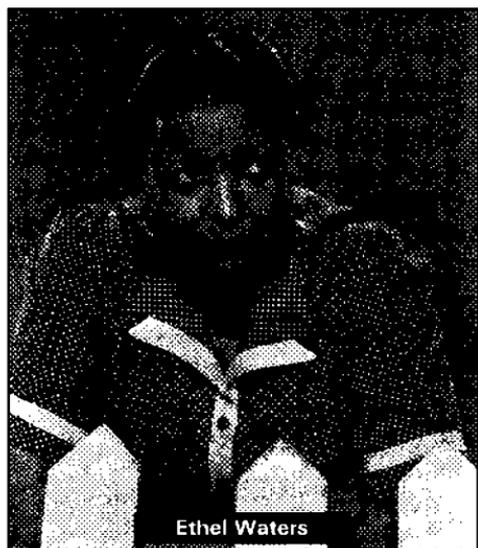
Moten, credited as the first black woman to break the mammy/maid stereotype, damaged her vocal cords after George Gershwin refused to transpose Bess’ songs in *Porgy and Bess* to a lower key to accommodate her sultry tone, after she replaced

Anna Brown. Moten never fully regained her voice. In her 60-year career, she appeared with both Duke Ellington’s orchestra and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In fact, she lived in Chicago in her semi-retirement.

Life could be good for blacks with comic or musical talents who did not aspire to major roles. Stepin

Fetchit was making \$3,000 a week when the sum could buy many times more than now. He could boast that he was “the first Negro entertainer to become a millionaire.” Eddie Anderson, the “Rochester” of Jack Benny’s radio and TV shows, was not only the highest paid black actor of the time, Benny saw to it that Anderson was paid even for weeks he was not in the script. But that didn’t mean these easily recognizable men could go to any hotel or play on any golf course they wanted to.

Clarence Muse held a law degree and



Ethel Waters

PHOTOFEST



Etta Moten

PHOTOFEST

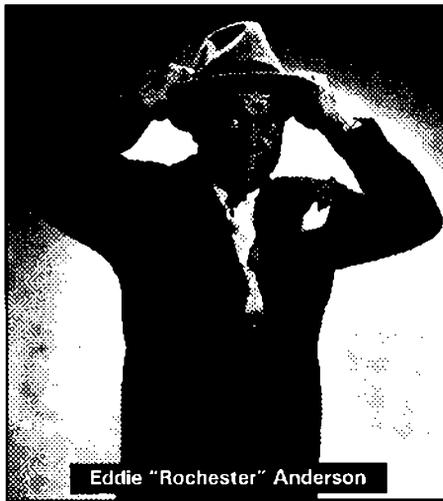
acted and sang in concerts, and in Hollywood he co-wrote scripts and songs. But he had to take whatever roles he could find, including an early East Side Kids movie, *That Gang of Mine* (1941). He brings a surprising poignancy as the impoverished owner of a racehorse, and behind his lines you sense the restraint blacks had to exert while putting on a happy face for white folks. Like his racehorse in the story, Muse could have been a winner if only he had been given a chance.

Despite the menial roles available to



Louise Beavers

PHOTOFEST



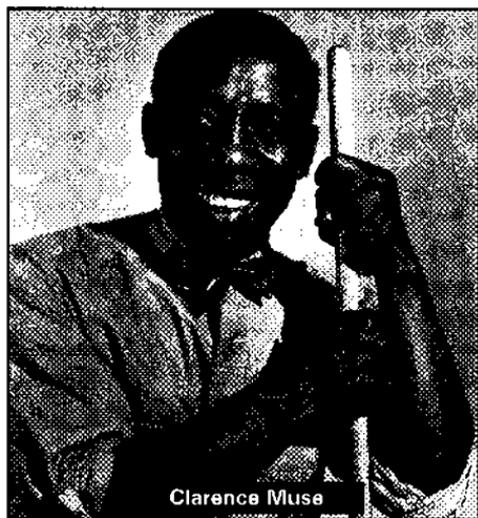
Eddie "Rochester" Anderson

PHOTOPLST

African-American men, some entered the field out of sheer love for moviemaking, such as Rex Ingram, who had a medical degree from Northwestern University. Dr. Ingram was not a very good actor, but he dominated his roles with a sense of "isn't this fun?" such as Lucifer in *Cabin in the Sky* and the scene-stealing genie in *Thief of Baghdad* (1940).

Some blacks were working behind the screen without any fanfare, such as Jester Hairston, the grandson of a slave. As an actor the only roles he could get were as a servant or shouting "Bwana, Bwana!" in Tarzan films, so he took on side work as a choral director. Hairston arranged more than 300 spirituals and folk songs, some used in the Westerns *Red River* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Hairston later played small roles on TV's *Amos 'n' Andy*, but his arrangement of "Aaaamen!" (in which he dubbed for Sidney Poitier) virtually made the film *Lillies of the Field* (1963).

Since maternal black women were never seen as a threat to white audiences, they provided co-starring roles in three popular films about daughters with a black heritage who pass for white: in *Pinky* (1949) with Ethel Waters, and in both versions of



Clarence Muse

PHOTOFEST

Imitation of Life (1934 with Claudette Colbert and Louise Beavers as the mothers, and 1959 with Lana Turner and Juanita Moore.) In all three films, the black mother shows more compassion than the whites her daughter mingles with.

The growing influence of socially conscious writers and directors after WWII allowed them to create meaningful roles for African-Americans, usually in well-budgeted independent films.

"Ben!" John Garfield shouts as he awakes from a nightmare in the opening of *Body and Soul* (1947). Garfield plays a boxer overwhelmed with grief over the death of his black trainer and friend, played by former violinist-jockey-boxer Canada Lee, whose real name was Lionel Canegata. Lee won a fight with Alfred Hitchcock, who wanted him to talk like a darkie in *Lifeboat*.

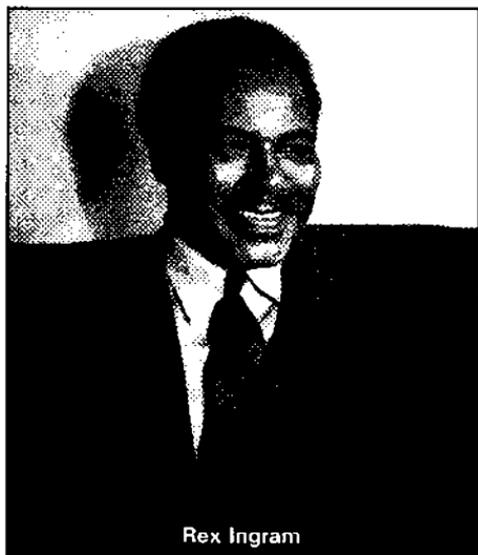
Garfield's *Breaking Point* (1950) might have come off as just a nicely done action picture had it not been for Juano Hernandez as the mate aboard a motorboat smuggling refugees. You might not recognize his name, but the dark-skinned Hernandez combined a lined, intelligent face with perhaps the saddest voice in movies. He also provided the moral weight that same year

in Kirk Douglas' jazz film, *Young Man With a Horn*, and was the wise judge in Glenn Ford's *Trial* (1955).

Sidney Poitier created an immediate impression co-starring with Richard Widmark as a black doctor being goaded by an angry white bigot in *No Way Out* (1950), a film that is still strong today. In *Blackboard Jungle*, Glenn Ford's character mistakenly suspects Poitier of leading teens in acts against teachers because the black student is the most intelligent in the racially mixed class.

With general audiences accepting more substantial roles for blacks, television followed. In the early 1960s, Gail Fisher of New Jersey held up a box of All detergent and made a little bit of history. She went on from being the first black person featured in a national commercial to winning an Emmy award as the secretary in *Mannix*.

Although the integration of African-American and Caucasian characters in American films increased the opportunities and challenges for black performers, the trend turned its back on the singers and dancers who had enlivened films of earlier decades. CBS unjustly picked an easy target, Stepin Fetchit.



Rex Ingram

PHOTOFEST



Canada Lee

PHOTOFEST



Juano Hernandez

PHOTOFEST

Hurt by the documentary accusing him of betraying his people, Fetchit, who had declared bankruptcy back in 1947, announced in his news release that he was suing the network for \$3 million. But the action was dismissed in the 1970s on the grounds that the criticism was directed at his roles and not at him personally. Even a favorable ruling would have been hollow. While the suit was pending, Fetchit's son, Donald Perry, killed three people and committed suicide on the Pennsylvania turnpike.

Fetchit found some dignity late in life. He received a Special Image Award from the Hollywood chapter of the NAACP in 1976 and two years later, while a resident

of the Motion Picture and Television Country House, he was elected to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame. He died still embittered in 1985.

By then, using African-Americans as walking consciences seemed dated. Ever since the middle 1950s, they had been playing such mainstream characters as robbers (Harry Belafonte in *Odds Against Tomorrow*) and Civil War soldiers (Sammy Davis Jr. in *Band of Angels*).

With social consciousness passé, we are now being offered films with no character to look on events with the sad eyes of Juano Hernandez or someone like Louise Beavers saying, "Honey, what you're doing ain't right."

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RADIO CELEBRITY CENTENNIAL BIRTH DATES 1905-2005

COMPILED BY RON SAYLES

Radio Favorites Born in 1905—One Hundred Years Ago This Year:



Anne Hummert



Truman Bradley

PHOTOEST



Arthur Lake



Harold Perry

- January 19 **Anne Ashenhurst Hummert** (d. 7-5-96) *Producer of daytime dramas*
 February 8 **Truman Bradley** (d. 7-28-74) *Announcer: Red Skelton Show*
 April 17 **Arthur Lake** (d. 1-10-87) *Actor: Blondie*
 April 21 **Ted Osborne** (d. 2-12-87) *Actor: Suspense, X Minus One, Cinnamon Bear*
 May 14 **Herbert Morrison** (d. 1-10-89) *Announcer: Hindenburg Disaster*
 July 20 **Murray Forbes** (d. 1-28-87) *Actor: Mu Perkins, Today's Children, Lights Out*
 July 25 **Harold Peary** (d. 3-30-85) *Actor: Great Gildersleeve, Harold Peary Show*
 August 3 **Gaylord Carter** (d. 11-20-2000) *Organist: Amos 'n' Andy, Bride and Groom*
 August 26 **George Hicks** (d. 3-17-65) *Announcer, Newsmen: D-Day invasion*
 August 31 **Larry Elliott** (d. 7-27-57) *Announcer: Mr. Keen, Treasury Star Parade*
 September 18 **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson** (d. 2-28-77) *Actor: Jack Benny Program*
 October 7 **Andy Devine** (d. 2-20-77) *Actor: Jack Benny, Wild Bill Hickok, Lum and Abner*
 October 12 **Jane Ace** (d. 11-11-74) *Actress: Easy Aces, Mr. Ace and Jane*
 November 14 **Wilbur "Budd" Hulick** (d. unknown) *Actor: Stoopnagle and Budd*
 November 16 **Eddie Condon** (d. 8-4-73) *Guitarist: Eddie Condon's Jazz Concerts*
 November 19 **Tommy Dorsey** (d. 11-26-56) *Bandleader: Raleigh-Kool Show, Fame & Fortune*
 December 13 **Jay Jostyn** (d. 7-24-77) *Actor: Mr. District Attorney*



Eddie Anderson



Andy Devine



Jane Ace

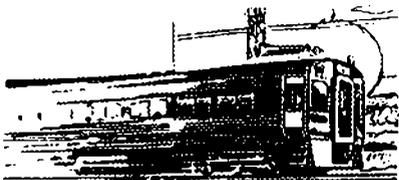


Tommy Dorsey

A much more complete listing of birth dates (and death dates) of show business personalities may be found on Ron Sayles' web page:

<http://mywebpage.netscape.com/bogusotr/instant/taz.html>

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- *All-you-can-eat buffet**
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Movie Music and the Radio

BY BILL RYAN

What did a pre-rock Hollywood producer love more than a hit movie?

It was a hit movie containing hit songs which were played on the radio. This brought new audiences into the theatres to see the movie and often prompted them to buy records containing the movie music.

It doesn't happen much any more, but a great example was the 1953 movie *Calamity Jane*. It made big money for Warner Bros. Two songs from its soundtrack, "The Deadwood Stage" and "Secret Love", were released by Columbia Records and were immense hits for Doris Day and arranger-conductor Ray Heindorf.

It was a happy circle, with folks hearing Miss Day's songs on the radio, then going to the movie, then, perhaps, buying the record.

Heindorf, who was music director for Warner Bros., repeated the operation the following year with Judy Garland and her songs in the movie *A Star is Born*. This time it was a Columbia LP containing, among other songs, Judy's

*I was born in a trunk
In the Princess Theater
In Pocatello, Idaho.
It was during the matinee on Friday,
And they used a makeup towel
For my didee.*

And since Pocatello, Idaho, is my home town, I can testify that there once was a Princess Theater

Bill Ryan is a retired college professor and former broadcast news writer-editor for UPI.



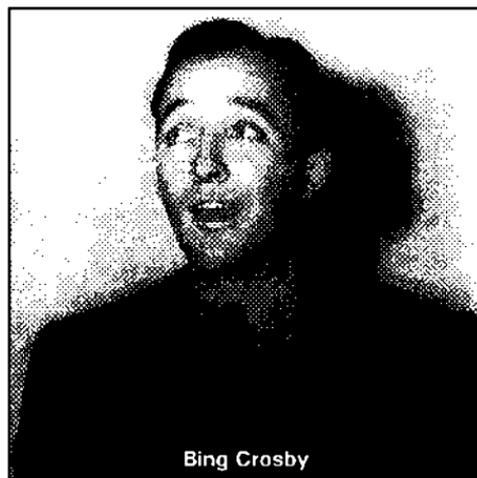
Judy Garland

Bing Crosby introduced the megahit "White Christmas" in the 1942 musical *Holiday Inn*. The soundtrack arrangement was made by Robert Emmett Dolan, who also produced the picture.

But John Scott Trotter arranged Bing's Decca Records version, which sold in the millions and is still selling. Hearing the song on the radio undoubtedly drove new audiences to see the movie. Another happy circle.

Hollywood composers scored double if their soundtrack music made it to records and the purchasing public.

Straight background music on movie



Bing Crosby

soundtracks was sometimes noticed and demanded by record fans. Such was David Raksin's haunting "Laura," which was heard in a forgettable 1944 movie but stood by itself. Words were added and "Laura" became a standard.

Twentieth Century Fox music director Alfred Newman may have started it all in 1947 with record release of his score from *Captain from Castile*.

Victor Young of Paramount led a dance band in the 1920s and wrote many hit songs before going into motion picture scoring. His songs such as "Sweet Sue" and "Golden Earrings" were played for weeks on *Your Hit Parade*. Young was also the recipient of many Oscars for his soundtracks.

André Previn spent 25 years composing and conducting at MGM while playing jazz piano on dozens of LPs and making countless arrangements for singers. He describes it all in his excellent book "My 25 Years in Hollywood."

And speaking of MGM, in his biography of Gene Kelly, Clive Hirschhorn writes of the famous Freed Unit, captained by Arthur Freed.

"The unit included Roger Edens, one of Hollywood's most accomplished music men; Lennic Hayton, husband of Lena Horne; André [Previn]; Johnny Green; Saul Chaplin; Vincente Minnelli, and Conrad Salinger, the finest orchestrator [together with Ray Heindorf at Warner Brothers] ever to work in films and the man responsible for giving the classic MGM musicals their particular sound."

All of the above wrote and recorded songs which were widely played on the radio and drew folks to the movies that spawned them.

So radio could thank Hollywood for some of its finer music, and the movie producers were grateful that radio promoted their product. ■

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JANUARY 2005

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

SATURDAY, JANUARY 1 HAPPY NEW YEAR!

★ **JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (12-31-44) On New Year's Eve Jack makes a resolution to be friends with Fred Allen and the cast presents their annual play, "The New Tenant." In this WW II sketch, Jack is the Old Year; Phil Harris is Uncle Sam; Mary Livingstone is Columbia; Don Wilson is the World. Cast includes Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Larry Stevens, Mel Blanc, Frank Nelson, Joe Kearns. Broadcast from New York. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

CHAMPAGNE MUSIC OF LAWRENCE WELK (12-31-70/1-1-71) Remote broadcast from the Hollywood Palladium finds the Welk organization counting down to midnight and welcoming in the New Year. Music includes "The Song Is You," "What the World Needs Now," "Muskrat Ramble," and "Beer Barrel Polka." With Dick Dale, Peanuts Hucko, Bob Lido, Myron Floren. Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

★ **EDDIE CANTOR SHOW** (12-27-44) Eddie and Harry Von Zell discuss plans for their New Year's Eve show at the Hollywood Canteen.

With Bert Gordon, Leonard Seuss, Nora Martin. Sal Hepatica, Trushay, NBC. (29 min)

SUSPENSE (12-28-58) "32nd of December" starring Frank Lovejoy as a man who sets out to pawn his wife's ring to cover his gambling debts but instead buys an unusual antique clock which has the ability to control time. Cast: Joan Banks, Barney Phillips, Sam Pierce, Norm Alden. Sustaining, CBS. (19 min)

HENRY MORGAN SHOW (1-1-47) The comedian reports on his 1946 broadcasts and offers a preview of 1947. In a spoof of *Your Hit Parade*, he presents the "most hated" songs on "Your Obit Parade." Arnold Stang. Eversharp, ABC. (24 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-31-47) Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, who has planned to go to three New Year's Eve parties. The Jolly Boys want Gildy to take lonely Judge Hooker to the celebrations. Cast: Lillian Randolph, Walter Tetley, Dick LeGrand, Earle Ross, Louise Erickson. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 8 ROY ROGERS ON RADIO

★ **KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (6-29-44) Bing Crosby welcomes guest **Roy Rogers** to the Music Hall, where they talk about horses and then their horses talk about them! Later, *Time Marches Back* to 1924. Kraft Foods, NBC. (29 min)

★ **CHARLIE MCCARTHY SHOW** (12-7-47) Edgar Bergen stars with guests **Roy Rogers** and the Sons of the Pioneers. Roy shows Charlie how tough it is to be a movie cowboy. Edgar tells Mortimer Snerd how to keep a diary. Royal Pudding, Chase and Sanborn Coffee, NBC. (30 min)

★ **NEW ROY ROGERS SHOW** (4-15-54) The King of the Cowboys and his Queen of the West, Dale Evans, star with Pat Brady. At a County Fair in Arizona, Pat, who is stuck at the top of a stalled Ferris Wheel, spots two men beating up a third man. Roy and Dale investigate. Dodge-Plymouth Automobiles, NBC. (29 min)

★ **KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (3-17-49) Al Jolson stars with Oscar Levant, Ken Carpenter, Lou Bring and the orchestra and guests **Roy Rogers** and Dale Evans. Roy thinks Al could become a singing cowboy in the movies. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

★ **BOB HOPE SHOW** (6-10-52) Broadcasting from the San Diego Naval Air Station in Coronado, California, Bob and guests **Roy Rogers** and Dale Evans are preparing for a cross-country tour to promote Bob and Roy's new motion picture, "Son of Paleface." Chesterfield Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

★ **OUR SPECIAL GUEST** is movie historian **Bob Kolososki**, who will talk about the film career of Roy Rogers.

Read the cover story on page 4.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15 RADIO AND WORLD WAR II IN THE WINTER OF 1945 - Part 1

★ **FIRESIDE CHAT** (1-6-45) President Roosevelt reports to the nation on the State of the Union message he sent to Congress earlier this day. He talks about the authorization of the mobilization for war-related work of over four million men classified as unfit to serve in the military and for the "drafting" of registered nurses into the armed forces. *This is FDR's last Fireside Chat.* ALL NETWORKS. (26 min)

★ **WORLD NEWS TODAY** (1-7-45) Douglas Edwards and reports from correspondents

worldwide, including Charles Colingwood and Richard C. Hottelet. "The American First Army has gained three miles on the northern flank of the Belgium Bulge and has cut one of two main roads supplying the Germans on that front. To the south, the enemy is increasing pressure on the American Seventh Army. A large force of Allied bombers, based in Britain, attacked the German communications today. In the Pacific, the Japanese say Allied warships are shelling the coast of Luzon." Admiral Radios, CBS. (25 min)

★ **LUX RADIO THEATRE** (1-15-45) "The Master Race" starring George Colouris, Nancy Gates, Stanley Ridges, Helen Beverly and Paul Guilfoyle, all in their original 1944 screen roles. The Germans are losing the war and a Nazi colonel goes incognito into a Belgian village to scheme to keep Hitler's Master Race alive. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (25 min & 17 min & 18 min)

★ **EDDIE CANTOR SHOW** (1-24-45) In a program dedicated to Uncle Sam and his War Bond Campaign, Eddie talks about FDR's inauguration ceremonies, offers his version of an Axis broadcast and worries about his wife Ida, who wants a divorce. Harry Von Zell, Bert Gordon. Bristol Myers relinquishes commercials for war bond messages. NBC. (29 min)

★ **CAVALCADE OF AMERICA** (2-5-45) "The Road to Berlin" starring Bing Crosby, recounting his eight-week tour of England and France to entertain U. S. soldiers, playing to audiences ranging from 400 to 15,000 three times a day. DuPont, NBC. (29 min)

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JANUARY 2005

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22 RADIO AND WORLD WAR II IN THE WINTER OF 1945 – Part 2

★ **COMMAND PERFORMANCE** (2-15-45) "Dick Tracy in B Flat" starring Bing Crosby as Dick Tracy; Dinah Shore as Tess Trueheart, Bob Hope as Flattop, Jimmy Durante as The Mole, Judy Garland as Snowflake, Andrews Sisters as Summer Sisters, Frank Sinatra as Shaky. An-all star "comic strip operetta" AFRS. (28 min & 26 min) *Read the article on page 16.*

★ **FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY** (2-27-45) Jim and Marian Jordan star. Fibber finds out that someone has replaced him as head of the Red Cross Drive for his district. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

★ **PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT** (3-1-45) The president reports to a joint session of Congress on his 14,000-mile trip to Malta

and Yalta. *This is FDR's last address to Congress.* CBS and all networks. (31 min & 30 min)
★ **WORLD NEWS TODAY** (3-25-45) Bob Trout and CBS correspondents worldwide report. "On the eastern bank of the Rhine... the 21st Army Group has linked all its bridgeheads. The Allies are pouring men and materiel across the river in preparation for the decisive battle. ...Washington reports that three B-29s were lost in yesterday's low-level attack on Japan's aircraft factories, ...but bombing results were described as good." Admiral Radios, CBS. (25 min)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29

SUSPENSE (9-30-48) "The Man Who Wanted to be Edward G. Robinson" starring Edward G. Robinson as a Walter Mitty type, a meek little man who decides to murder his wife. AutoLite, CBS. (30 min)

COUPLE NEXT DOOR (12-30-58) Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce star with Margaret Hamilton. The family returns home to find a cold house. Sustaining, CBS. (15 min)

EMPIRE BUILDERS (1-19-31) Don Ameche stars as a movie actor who is mistaken for a real sheriff by a gang of badmen. Story is set at Glacier National Park. Great Northern Railway, NBC. (30 min)

A DATE WITH JUDY (3-20-45) Louise Erickson stars as Judy Foster with Bob Hastings as Oogie Pringle. Guest is actress Dorothy Lamour. When Judy breaks up with Oogie, he writes a song for Dorothy to sing at an Army camp show. AFRS rebroadcast. (27 min)

A LIFE IN YOUR HANDS (7-24-52) Carlton Kaddell stars as Jonathan Kegg, "a friend of the court," who doesn't take sides, but attempts to learn the truth. An "earwitness" helps solve a murder. Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

★ **COMMAND PERFORMANCE #38** (10-24-42) Actress Linda Darnell introduces "deadpan" singer Virginia O'Brien, Zero Mostel, Erskine Hawkins and comedian Red Skelton. AFRS. (29 min) *Read the article about Virginia O'Brien on page 56.*



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FEBRUARY 2005

26th Annual *TWTD* Jack Benny Month

Benny's Last Stand

Twenty broadcasts from Jack's final season on radio, 50 years ago, starring Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie Anderson, Bob Crosby and Don Wilson with Mel Blanc, Frank Nelson, Sheldon Leonard, Bea Benaderet, Artie Auerback, Benny Rubin, Elvia Allman, Sara Berner, Joe Kearns, Arthur Q. Bryan, Shirley Mitchell and the Sportsmen.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5

JACK BENNY (1-2-55) Presenting the new, sophisticated Benny Show. Jack recounts his day at the Rose Parade. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (1-9-55) Jack takes an early morning walk in Beverly Hills, has breakfast, meets the Sportsmen, then retires to his Library to read "The Mystery of the Elephant's Graveyard." Mel Blanc is the native guide and all the animals. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (1-16-55) Jack's show starts without a script and he bawls out his writers, who come up with a murder mystery for the end of the program. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (1-23-55) Before Jack goes to the races he must visit his vault to get some money. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (1-30-55) Jack cleans out the garage before Don takes him to the Beverly Wilshire Health Club. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12

JACK BENNY (2-13-55) In a flashback to last year, everyone is planning surprise birthday parties for Jack. But he's upset and thinks everyone has forgotten his big day. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (2-20-55) The Beverly Hills Beavers put on a play at the school auditorium. It turns out to be their version of Jack's program. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (2-27-55) Jack leaves his rehearsal to watch the wrestling matches on television. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (3-6-55) Warner Bros. wants to make "The Life of Jack Benny." Guest is Danny Kaye. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (3-13-55) Jack puts his house up for sale. Then, after rehearsal, Jack, Dennis, Bob and Mary go to the golf course. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19

JACK BENNY (3-20-55) Jack is called to serve on jury duty. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (3-27-55) The cast does their version of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," a tale of the Alaskan Northwest. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (4-3-55) Jack visits his vault and brings Ed, the guard, upstairs. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (4-10-55) On Easter Sunday, Jack and Mary take a stroll down Wilshire Boulevard. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (4-17-55) Jack and guest Bob Hope go on a picnic with the CBS telephone operators, Gertrude Gearshift and Mabel Flapsaddle. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26

JACK BENNY (4-24-55) Jack and fellow members of the Beverly Hills Beavers debate whether or not to have a party. 20th Century Fox is interested in renting Jack's Maxwell and Jack himself as a stunt driver. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (5-1-55) While doing some spring cleaning, Rochester comes across some of Jack's old love letters. Later, Jack's publicity agent suggests he buy a baseball team. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (5-8-55) Jack prepares for a cast picnic on the beach with the Beverly Hills Beavers. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (5-15-55) Rochester is cleaning up the house because Jack is having the living room painted. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

JACK BENNY (5-22-55) Twombly, the sound effects man, wants a chance to "showoff" his talent. *This is the last program of the season and, after an outstanding 23-year run (1932-1955) is also Jack's last regular program on radio.* Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)



Andy Griffith

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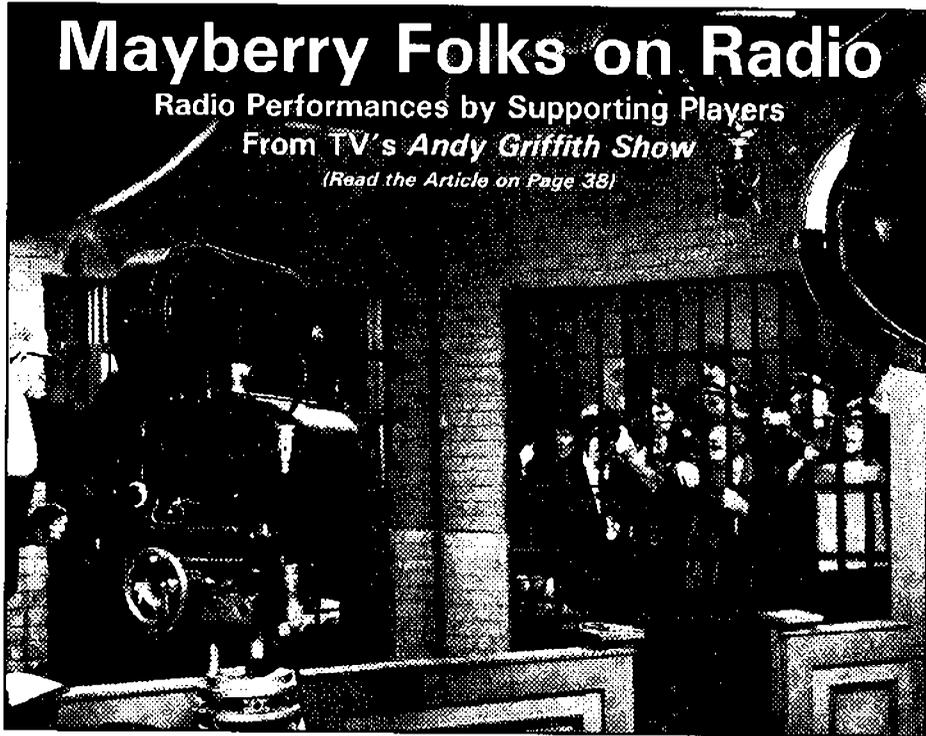
MARCH 2005

Mayberry Folks on Radio

Radio Performances by Supporting Players

From TV's *Andy Griffith Show*

(Read the Article on Page 38)



SATURDAY, MARCH 5 - Part 1

GUNSMOKE (9-12-53) "Prairie Happy" starring William Conrad, Parley Baer, Howard McNear, Georgia Ellis, with John Dehner and Lawrence Dobkin. The Pawnees are going to attack Dodge City. Sustaining, CBS. (28 min)

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (11-7-48) Ozzie is convinced that his "set pattern" of living should be broken. The Nelsons appear with John Brown, Jack Kirkwood, Tommy Bernard, Henry Blair, Janet Waldo, Lurene Tuttle. Announcer is Vern Smith. International Silver Co., NBC. (29 min)

ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN (3-27-43) "Adventure of the Circus Train" starring Hugh Marlowe as Ellery, with Marion Shockley as

Nikki. A circus fortune-teller attempts to identify the murderer on a moving train. Bromo Seltzer, NBC. (28 min)

SUSPENSE (1-18-54) "The Face is Familiar" starring Jack Benny as a man whose face is so common that no one can remember what he looks like. Some bank robbers take advantage of that fact. Cast includes Sheldon Leonard, Hy Averbach, Herb Butterfield, Joseph Kearns. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

BROADWAY IS MY BEAT (1945) "The Val Dane Murder" starring Larry Thor as Detective Danny Clover, who investigates the unusual death of a novelist. Sustaining, NBC. (27 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 12 – Part 2

INNER SANCTUM (1-12-48) "Tempo in Blood" starring Mason Adams and **Everett Sloane**. A pianist commits the perfect crime and doesn't know it. AFRS rebroadcast. (24 min)

LUM AND ABNER (1949) Chester Lauck and **Norris Goff** star as Lum Edwards and Abner Peabody with Clarence Hartzell and Willard Waterman. Lum wants to borrow some money to travel to his lodge convention in Leavenworth, Kansas. Frigidare, CBS. (27 min)

VIC AND SADE (1938) Rush plans a party. Art Van Harvey as Victor Gook and **Billy Idelson** as Rush Gook. NBC. (9 min)

ROCKY FORTUNE (1953) Frank Sinatra stars as Rocky, a "footloose and fancy-free young man." Rocky's job is to baby sit a television-performing monkey. Cast includes **Herb Vigran**, Alice Backus, **Barney Phillips**. Sustaining, NBC. (23 min)

OUR MISS BROOKS (6-12-49) Eve Arden stars as English teacher Connie Brooks, with **Richard Crenna** as Walter Denton, Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin and Jeff Chandler as Mr. Boynton. There's a Wishing Well dance at Madison High School and Walter decides to play Cupid. Palmolive Soap, Lustre Creme Shampoo, CBS. (28 min)

MAISIE (2-23-50) Ann Sothern stars with Bea Benaderet, **Howard McNear**, Frank Nelson, Pat McGeehan, **Peter Leeds**, and Sidney Miller. Maisie Revere offers kisses to all who buy men's accessories from her boyfriend, a sales clerk at Bixel's Department Store. Syndicated. (27 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 19 – Part 3

DRENE TIME (2-23-47) Frances Langford, Don Ameche and **Danny Thomas** star with Carmen Dragon and the orchestra. Don and Danny answer letters from listeners, Danny offers a song about a mummy, and all three appear in a Bickersons sketch. Drene Shampoo, NBC. (29 min)

HAVE GUN, WILL TRAVEL (9-18-60) **John Dehner** stars as Paladin. The son of an old friend shows up at Paladin's door, claiming that his stepfather is mistreating him. Cast: **Sam Edwards**, Johnny Watson, **Ken Lynch**. Various sponsors, CBS. (24 min)

COLUMBIA WORKSHOP (5-31-42) "The City

Wears a Slouch Hat" starring **Les Tremayne** with **Forrest Lewis**, **Jonathan Hole**. Les Tremayne, as "The Voice," narrates the story with a score for a "Sound Orchestra" (all sound effects, no music). A very unusual concept for radio. Sustaining, CBS. (31 min)

BLONDIE (5-27-45) Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake star as Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead of Shady Lane Avenue. Blondie has social aspirations and invites a socialite (Verna Felton) to tea. When Dagwood tells his boss, Mr. Dithers (Hanley Stafford), he sends his wife Cora (**Elvia Allman**) to crash the party. AFRS rebroadcast. (31 min)

FIRST NIGHTER (2-5-48) "Drink for the Damned" starring **Barbara Luddy** and **Olan Soule** in a romantic drama set in the time of King James' court. Cast includes Marvin Miller, **Parley Baer**, Willard Waterman, Arthur Q. Bryan. Campana Products, CBS. (30 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 26 – Part 4

DRAGNET (1-31-52) "The Big Almost No-Show" stars Jack Webb as Joe Friday with **Barney Phillips** as Ed Jacobs. A woman reports the disappearance of her 30-year-old brother. Fatima Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY (5-18-43) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees of Wistful Vista. When Fibber borrows Mrs. Uppington's car, it is stolen. Cast includes **Isabel Randolph**, Bill Thompson, Arthur Q. Bryan, Harlow Wilcox. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

GRAND CENTRAL STATION (7-1-41) "We Want to get Married" starring Frances Chaney, Paul Stewart, **Tom Tully**, **Karl Swenson** and Bennet Kilpack. A newlywed couple get their marriage off to a bad start when the husband loses his job. Rinso, NBC. (29 min)

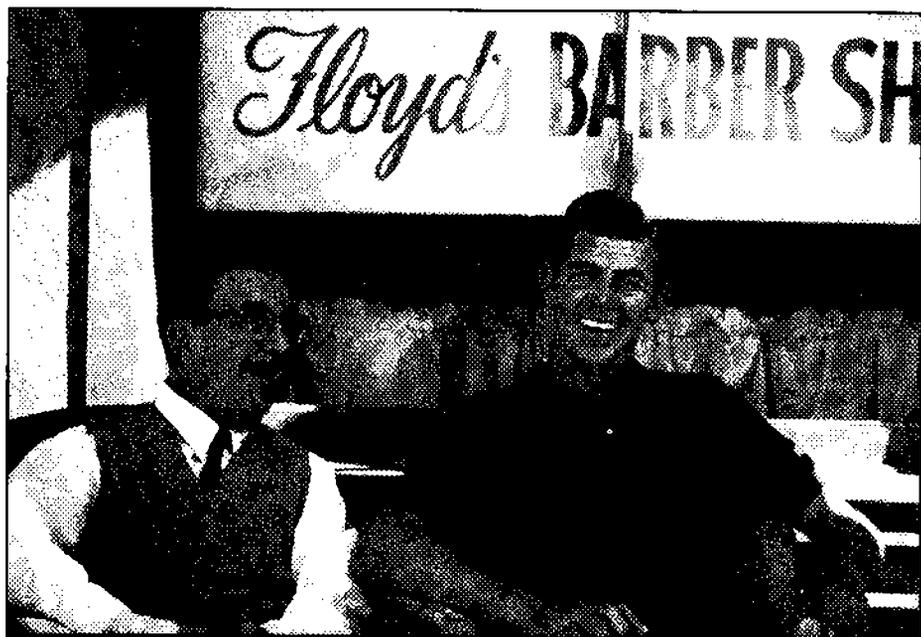
MEET CORLISS ARCHER (4-6-47) **Janet Waldo** is Corliss, **Sam Edwards** is Dexter Franklin, Fred Shields and Irene Tedrow are Mr. and Mrs. Archer. Corliss is excited about a department store beauty contest. Del Sharbutt announces. Campbell Soups, CBS. (29 min)

GUNSMOKE (1-25-59) "The Boots" stars William Conrad, **Parley Baer**, **Howard McNear**, Georgia Ellis with **Lawrence Dobkin**, Vic Perrin, Richard Beals. A 45-year-old drunk and a 14-year-old orphan make a strange couple. Various sponsors, CBS. (28 min)

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RADIO FOLKS IN MAYBERRY

BY KEN ALEXANDER

As radio's Golden Age came to an end, some of the programs moved to TV. During this time, numerous radio actors, writers and directors found work in the new medium – some with shows that had made the transition from radio to television, others with new shows conceived for TV.

Thus, the credit lists of TV shows of the 1950s and '60s include a host of names familiar to fans of old-time radio.

One such series is *The Andy Griffith Show*, which debuted in 1960 and during its eight-season run on the CBS Television Network was always in the top 10 shows in the Nielsen audience ratings. Many of

Ken Alexander's favorite television program is The Andy Griffith Show. It is, in fact, the only program the veteran radio announcer watches regularly. Ken may be heard every week on Those Were The Days.

the people who contributed to the success of that show had been recruited from radio.

Let's look at some of these radio folks who later moved to Mayberry.

The Andy Griffith Show had its beginning as a kind of pilot in February 1960 when the concept of the North Carolina town of Mayberry and its sheriff was introduced as an episode of *The Danny Thomas Show*. Danny Thomas had worked on radio on *The Baby Snooks Show* and on NBC's *The Big Show*, as well as on *The Bickersons*, in the role of Brother Amos.

It was Sheldon Leonard who created *The Andy Griffith Show* and served as executive producer. Sheldon had done a great deal of acting on network radio – most fans will remember him as the racetrack tout on *The Jack Benny Program*. He also played Judy Canova's boyfriend, Joe

Crunchmiller, on her show, and he acted on *The Halls of Ivy*, *The Damon Runyon Theater*, *Broadway is My Beat*, and *The Phil Harris/Alice Faye Show*.

The scripts for 18 episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show* were co-written by Bill Idelson, who may be best remembered by fans of old-time radio as Rush on *Vic and Sade*, although he also played Emil on *Those Websters*, Skeezix on *Gasoline Alley* and, for a time, Hank on *One Man's Family*.

Other writers of *The Andy Griffith Show* were John Whedon, who had provided some scripts for *The Great Gildersleeve*, and Paul Henning, one of the writers of *The Burns and Allen Show*.

Of actors from the Golden Age of radio there were many who worked on *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Andy Griffith's co-star for the first five seasons (the black-and-white era) of the show was Don Knotts, who had the role of Sheriff Taylor's deputy and best friend, Barney Fife. (Knotts returned to the show for special appearances as guest star five times during the final three seasons, when the show was in color.)

Don Knotts played a role in one radio series, which ran from 1949 to 1955. It



Danny Thomas



Sheldon Leonard

was a half-hour western adventure show written for an audience of children: *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders*. In this series, heard on the Mutual network, Knotts played Windy Wales, a handyman on Bobby's ranch with a penchant for stretching the truth in the stories he told.

Mayberry's Mayor Roy Stoner was played by Parley Baer, who had a long tradition of radio acting. One of his best-known roles was that of Deputy Chester Wesley Proudfoot on *Gunsmoke*. He also worked on *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe*, *The Six-Shooter*, *Nightbeat*, *Escape*, and *Dragnet*.

Howard McNear, who portrayed Floyd Lawson, the addle-brained but lovable barber, had been busy in the radio days. He, too, had been a regular on *Gunsmoke*, as Dr. Charles Adams, but his voice had been heard also on dozens of other shows in a wide range of roles. In an episode of *Suspense*, he played a man plotting to kill his wife. And he portrayed Samuel the Seal and Slim Pickins the Cowboy on *The Cinnamon Bear*.

Les Tremayne was one of the most celebrated radio actors of all time. For seven years he played the male lead on *The First Nighter Program*. He also was Nick Charles on *The Adventures*



Don Knotts

PHOTOFEST



Parley Baer

PHOTOFEST



Howard McNear



Les Tremayne

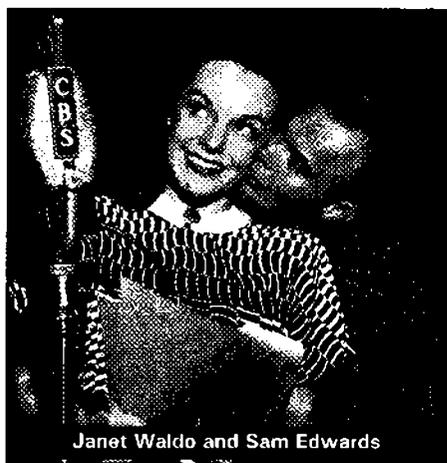
Wife for Andy" on the Griffith show. In the radio days she had had the title role in *Meet Corliss Archer* as well as other ingenue roles: a girlfriend of Eddie Bracken on his show, Emmy Lou on *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and parts on *Stars Over Hollywood* and *Young Love*.

Corliss Archer's boyfriend,

of the *Thin Man*; Bob, of *Betty and Bob*; Michael Waring on *The Falcon* and many other memorable characters. In the episode "Andy and Barney in the Big City" on *The Andy Griffith Show*, he took the part of one C. J. Hasler, a well-dressed, smooth and urbane jewel thief.

The man who replaced Les Tremayne as male lead on *The First Nighter Program*, Olan Soulé, and who also worked on *Grand Hotel*, *Captain Midnight*, *Chandu the Magician*, *Bachelor's Children* and many other shows originating in Chicago, later went to Hollywood and worked on *The Andy Griffith Show*. Soulé was the harried director of the Mayberry Choir, John Masters. In one episode, he was the desk clerk at the Mayberry Hotel.

Janet Waldo had a part in the episode "A



Janet Waldo and Sam Edwards

Dexter Franklin, was played for 12 years by Sam Edwards, who also worked on *Father Knows Best*, *Crime Classics* and many other shows. On the Griffith show, he played, among other roles, that of Lester Scobey, whom the mean Ben Weaver tried to evict from his home in the episode "Andy Forecloses."



Olan Soulé

Another teen-age girl of the Corliss Archer era was Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve's niece, Marjorie, who at one time was played by Lurene Tuttle. Ms. Tuttle had an extremely full career in radio. One of her most memorable parts was that of Effie Perrine, secretary to the private eye on *The Adventures of Sam Spade, Detective*. She also was Harriet's mother on *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and she appeared on such shows as *Arch Oboler's plays*, *Blondie*, *Box 13*, *Doctor Christian*, *A Date with Judy* and many more. She appeared on the Griffith show twice; in the second of her appearances – in "The Shoplifters" – she played an elderly woman who stole merchandise from

Weaver's department store.

Getting back to Gildy's niece, Marjorie: she eventually married her boyfriend, Bronco Thompson, who was played by Richard Crenna, whose other radio roles included Oogie Pringle on *A Date with Judy* and Walter Denton on *Our Miss Brooks*. Crenna did not act on *The Andy Griffith Show*, but he did direct a number of episodes.



Lurene Tuttle



Richard Crenna

Two other men who served as directors on the Griffith show and who had been actors in the radio days were Bob Sweeney



Bob Sweeney

and Lawrence Dobkin. Sweeney had been on *The Halls of Ivy*, *The Hoagy Carmichael Show*, and *Cathy and Elliott Lewis On Stage*

while Dobkin had played Archie on *The Adventures of Nero Wolfe*, Louie the cab driver on *The Saint* and various roles on shows including *Frontier Gentleman*, *Ellery Queen*, *Escape*, and *Broadway is My Beat*.

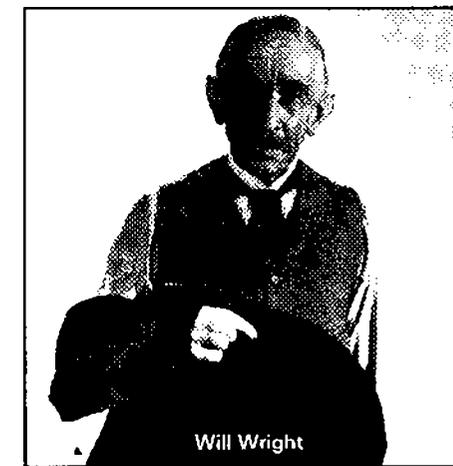
Among the townspeople of Mayberry was one Orville Monroc, proprietor of a funeral home and a TV repair shop. He was played by Jonathan Hole, an actor who had worked in radio on such shows as *Ma Perkins*, *Bachelor's Children*, *Confession*, and *Those Sensational Years*. He had worked as a staff announcer at station WBBM in Chicago as Jonathan Cole.

George Cisar took part in *Curtain Time* on the radio, as well as *Tell it Again*, a

children's program, and the documentary *Those Sensational Years*. On the Griffith show he played several characters, notably Cyrus Tankersley, who regularly played checkers in Floyd's barber shop.

Larry Thor played Mister Bronson in the Griffith episode "Barney's Physical," in 1964. From 1949 to '54 he was Detective Danny Clover on the CBS radio show *Broadway is my Beat*. He also was the announcer on *Rocky Jordan*, also on CBS, from 1949 to '50.

Aunt Bee's close friend Clara Edwards (also known as Clara Johnson and as Bertha) was played by Hope Summers, who in the radio days had appeared on *The World's Great Novels*, a show which offered dramatizations of classics by Dickens, Melville et al. The program was pro-



Will Wright

PHOTOFEST

duced at WMAQ, Chicago, and carried by the NBC Network in the middle and late '40s.

On *The Andy Griffith Show*, Ken Lynch played such roles as a plainclothes detective, a captain of the state police, or an FBI agent. In the Golden Age of radio, he had been Lt. Matt King in *21st Precinct* and Tank Tinker in *Hop Harrigan*.

Tom Tully acted as Walt Simpson, the dairy delivery man who was forced to replace his beloved horse and wagon with a truck in the Griffith episode "Goodbye, Dolly." In the radio days, Tully had been heard on *The Man From Homicide* and *Home of the Brave*.

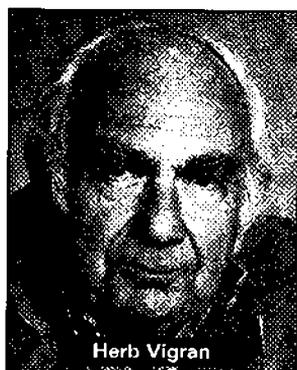
Karl Swenson was a radio actor of great versatility, who had roles on *Cavalcade of America*, *The Chase*, *Joe Palooka*, *The March of Time*, *The Mercury Theater on the Air* and a host of other shows. He was best known, probably, as Lorenzo Jones in the series of that name. He also had the title role in *Mister Chameleon*, a detective of many disguises. In the episode "Mr. McBeevie" on the Griffith show, he assumes an Irish accent to play a telephone lineman working in the woods who becomes Opie's friend.

Amzie Strickland played multiple roles on *The Andy Griffith Show*; one was Miss Rosemary in the episode "Andy the Matchmaker." Her career in old-time radio included work on *Call the Police*, *The Chase*, and *The Fat Man*.

Fans of Spike Jones and his City Slickers will fondly recall Doodles ("Feetlebaum") Weaver. He was seen twice on *The Andy Griffith Show*; in one of his appearances, in the episode "Aunt Bee's Brief Encounter," he is a mail carrier who delivers letters to Andy in the courthouse.



Karl Swenson



Herb Vigran

PHOTOFLSI

Ben Weaver, the owner of Weaver's department store, was played by three different actors during the run of the Griffith show. The most memorable was Will Wright. His Ben Weaver was a mean old man by all appearances, but with tenderness underneath. Will Wright's radio career included appearances on *The Charlotte Greenwood Show*, *The Man Called X*, *Mayor of the Town*, and *My Little Margie*.

Mrs. Sprague, Howard's mother on the Griffith show, was played by Mabel Albertson. In the 1930s she had appeared on *The Phil Baker Show*.

Cliff Norton was one of the men who played Wally, the owner of the filling station in Mayberry; he was in the episode "Goober's Replacment." *American Novels*, *Those Sensational Years*, and *Terry and the Pirates* are radio shows in which he appeared.

In a couple of Andy Griffith episodes, including "Helen's Past," Ruth McDevitt is Mrs. Ethel Pendleton, a member of the school board and the PTA. Her credits on old-time radio include appearances on the soap opera *This Life is Mine* and the NBC drama *Keeping Up with Rosemary*.

The Rev. Mr. Hobart M. Tucker is pastor of All Souls Church in Mayberry. He is played by William Keene, who years ago sometimes played Red Lantern, "the wisest fish in the ocean," in the children's radio show *Land of the Lost*.



Everett Sloane



John Dehner

Not all the men who passed through Mayberry were as righteous as the Rev. Mr. Tucker; there were a number of scoundrels. (After all, Andy Taylor was Sheriff, and it is to be expected that not all the folks he'd meet would be fine upstanding citizens.) Let's look at a few of these bad eggs.

Bill Medwin was a man who came to Mayberry to work in Floyd's barber shop, which he would use as a front for a bookie joint. He was played by Herb Vigran, who in the radio days was Harry the Horse on *The Damon Runyon Theater*. He also played The Sad Sack in the series of that name, as well as appearing on *The Eddie Cantor Show*, *Broadway is My Beat*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Halls of Ivy*, and many more shows.

In the Griffith episode "Barney on the Rebound," Jackie Coogan plays a crook who tries to collect a settlement from Barney for a breach-of-promise case he has cooked up. Back in 1946, Coogan had played the soda jerk Ernest Botch in the radio series *Forever Ernest*.

The actor Everett Sloane appeared in a host of old-time radio shows, among them *Betty and Bob*, the science-fiction show *Beyond Tomorrow*, *Cavalcade of America*, *Columbia Presents Corwin*, *The Danny Kaye Show*, and *The Ford Theater*. He was also Bulldog Drummond's sidekick Denny. On *The Andy Griffith Show*, Sloane played Jubal Foster, who operated an illegal still,

and tried to blame Opie and his friends when the shed containing the still caught fire. Everett Sloane also composed the lyric for the theme of *The Andy Griffith Show*, "The Fishin' Hole."

Barney Phillips was associated with a number of crime shows during the radio days (*Barrie Craig*, *Confidential Investigator*, *Dragnet*; *The Man From Homicide*; *Broadway is My Beat*; *Crime Classics*); thus it's appropriate that his appearance on the Griffith show was in the role of an escaped convict, Eddie Brooke.

George Petrie appeared in *Call the Police*, *The Casebook of Gregory Hood*, *The Falcon*, *Charlie Wild*, *Private Detective*, and other crime shows. When he appeared on the Griffith show, he always played a somewhat shady character. In "A Deal is a Deal" he was a partner in a company which tried to get the local grammar school boys to sell their Miracle Salve door-to-door.

Billy Halop as a child actor had been on *Coast-to-Coast on a Bus*, *Let's Pretend*, and *Our Barn*. But when he appeared on the Griffith show, he was a Dead End Kid grown to adulthood. In the episode "The Big House," for instance, he is an escaped convict.

A well-known radio actor was John Dehner, star of *Frontier Gentleman* as J. B. Kendall and *Have Gun, Will Travel* as Paladin. Dehner acted also in *Gunsmoke*, *Escape*, *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe*, *The Voyage of the Scarlet Queen*, and *Crime Classics*. When he took a guest shot on *The Andy Griffith Show*, he was Colonel Harvey, selling an elixir on the street. The potion had a high alcoholic content, and Aunt Bee and several of her friends became quite tipsy.

Jay Novello played on the soap opera

Aunt Mary as well as on *Doctor Kildare*, *The Lone Wolf*, and Erskine Johnson's *Hollywood*. For a short time he played Jack Packard on *I Love a Mystery* and Judge Hunter on *One Man's Family*. On the Griffith show he was an unscrupulous lawyer in the episode "Otis Sues the County."

Elvia Allman was an actress much in demand for comedic parts in the radio days, having appeared as Mrs. Ken Niles on *The Abbott and Costello Show*, Cora Dithers on *Blondie*, Gracie's friend Tootsie Sagwell on *The Burns and Allen Show*, and Penelope the Pelican on *The Cinnamon Bear*. She also was heard on *The Baby Snooks Show*, and on the radio shows of Eddie Cantor, Jimmy Durante, Phil Baker, and Judy Canova. On *The Andy Griffith Show* she appeared once, as Henrietta Swanson, the mother of a girl she was pushing to win top honors in "The Beauty Contest" episode.

Hugh Marlowe was Mister Maxwell, who was trying to produce a record of folk music performed by local musicians in the episode "Mayberry on Record." In the radio days his credits included *Crime Doctor*, *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*, and the soap opera *Brenda Curtis*.

Forrest Lewis acted in a couple of episodes of the Griffith Show; in one, he was Cy Hudgins, the owner of a pet goat which ate several sticks of dynamite and threatened to devastate the town. On radio he had been Wash in *The Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters*. He was also in *Meet Mister Meek*, *Scattergood Baines* and *Wild Bill Hickok*, and late in the run of *The Great Gildersleeve* he played the role of Mister Peavey.

Barney's landlady, Mrs. Mendelbright, was played by Enid Markey, who had acted



Elvia Allman



Norris Goff

in the old soap opera *Woman of Courage*.

An actor who played in *The Man Called X*, *Gunsmoke*, *Escape*, *Nightbeat*, *Maisie*, *Rogue's Gallery* and *The Stan Freberg Show* was Peter Leeds. In the Griffith episode "Andy and Barney in the Big City," he was Sergeant Nelson of the Raleigh Police.

One of the early color episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show* was "Opie's Job," in which the young lad is hired to work after school at Mister Doakes's grocery. Mister Doakes is played by the man who for 23 years on radio was Abner Peabody of *Lum and Abner*: Norris Goff.

Mary Lansing played multiple roles on the Griffith show, including those of Mrs. Lukens, the owner of a women's clothing store, and Martha Clark, Emmet's wife. In radio she had taken part in *The Mercury Theater of the Air*, *The Guiding Light*, *Junior Miss*, and *One Man's Family*. She also had been known for her ability to produce the vocal sounds of babies.

In the Griffith episode "Opie's Charity," Stuart Erwin plays Tom Silby. He had been the star of *The Stu Erwin Show*, a comedy program on CBS in the summer of 1945, and had appeared on *Jack Oakie College*.

Irene Tedrow acted on *Chandu the Magician*, *California Caravan*, *The Baby Snooks Show* and *Lights Out* back in the radio days. In 1965, on the Griffith episode "Opie's Newspaper," she was Mrs. Foster, whose chicken a la king, the paper



Stuart Erwin



Isabel Randolph

McGee and Molly.

As for the star of *The Andy Griffith Show*, he had had no experience in old-time radio; he would hardly have been old enough, unless he had played juvenile roles. Andy Griffith did not do any radio until 1979, 11 years after his TV show concluded its run. This was on *The Sears Radio Theater* on

reported, quoting Aunt Bee, tasted “like wallpaper paste.”

In “The Cow Thief,” Investigator William Upchurch comes to Mayberry to find the rustler. Ralph Bell plays the part – he had appeared on a number of the old radio shows, among them *The Strange Romance of Evelyn Winters*, *Cloak and Dagger*, *Columbia Presents Corwin*, *Valiant Lady*, *This is Nora Drake*, and *The FBI in Peace and War*.

Isabel Randolph played two roles on the Griffith show. In both, she is a member of Mayberry’s elite society. During the days of old-time radio she acted in the soap opera *Dan Harding’s Wife* and in *Kaltenmeyer’s Kindergarten*, but most fans will remember her as the snooty Mrs. Abigail Uppington on *Fibber*

CBS – one of the programs born of a small wave of nostalgia for old-time radio among the networks. The show was on the air five evenings a week. Andy Griffith was the host on Tuesday, Comedy Night. The series lasted one year; not an impressive showing. But when his television show, *The Andy Griffith Show*, concluded its eight-year run on March 25, 1968, it was Number One in the Nielsen ratings. That was a remarkable achievement – brought about, in large part, by a group of professional people who had gotten their training in old-time radio. ■

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A Fred Allen Christmas

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Back during the Depression days of the 1930s, Dorchester, a sprawling residential section of Boston, could hardly be classified as the happiest spot on earth. There was an epidemic of unemployment, jobs were scarce indeed, and belts had to be tightened.

Still, from time to time, happy faces could be spotted amid the despair. This was especially true at Christmas, when the good people of Dorchester, mostly Irish Catholic, somehow managed to pinch together enough pennies to assure loved ones of gifts on the great day.

Then there were the "mystery Christmas presents." They came from nowhere during the holiday season, and lifted gloom from desolation, and replaced it with delight. Nobody knew who sent them. Once they arrived, for a few days, at least, hard times were forgotten in Dorchester.

There was another reason for joy in Dorchester: A local boy had made good! Fred Allen, a vaudeville juggler, had hit it big on the radio as a comedian. There was even talk he might soon be making movies out in Hollywood.

"It's Town Hall Tonight!" the announcer called out over the radio. "And here comes Fred Allen now, leading Jack Benny and a parade of guests."

Clancy got up from his chair long enough to snap the parlor radio off. "Can't stand that guy," said Clancy as Allen's squeaky voice faded away. "Give me 'Pick and Pat' every time. They're what I call funny."

"Fred's funny too," his wife, Maggie,

insisted.

"Funny!" scoffed Clancy. "What's funny about Washington and politicians? That stuff Allen does leaves me cold."

"You're jealous of Fred," countered his wife. "He grew up in the same neighborhood. He's on the radio making big money. You're sitting home doing nothing."

Clancy snarled, but didn't say a word.

"What about the waiter's job?" his wife thought to ask.

"They wouldn't hire me, Maggie," her husband said sadly. "They said I had to have one of those black suits the waiters wear. They told me they'd be able to give me work if I had one of those waiter suits with the black bow ties."

Maggie sighed. "It's going to be a sad Christmas," she said before heading for the kitchen to do some ironing. "No money's coming in, and everything is going out. There'll be no joy for us this holiday."

Clancy waited until his wife left the parlor, and then switched the radio back on again. Why not? Jack Benny, a favorite, was a guest with Allen.

Allen was doing "The News of The Week," a regular feature of the show, and was interviewing a character named Tufton Pumps. "Tell me, Mr. Pumps," the comedian said, "what did you think of the cold wave?"

"Worst weather I've seen in ten years, 'cept for one year," said Pumps in his best Maine twang

"What happened that year?" Allen asked.

"Nothing," said Pumps, matter of factly.

"Nothing?" said Allen, surprised.

"Broke my glasses that year," said Pumps. "Couldn't see a dang thing that year."

Richard W. O'Donnell is a free-lance writer from Port Richey, Florida.



Fred Allen and Portland Hoffa

The radio audience roared. So did Clancy.

The next day, Christmas Eve, a messenger knocked on the door of Clancy's flat. (Clancy, it should be noted, was not his real name.) The messenger left a Christmas package, and departed. Inside, there was a black waiter's suit that fit Clancy perfectly.

Quite a few people in Fred Allen's old neighborhood were listening to him that Christmas week. Mrs. Cappadona was one of them. She almost burst into a smile when Jack Benny tried to sell her old neighbor a second-hand car.

Mrs. Cappadona had trouble smiling. True, there was a depression. But her husband had a steady job. It didn't pay much — enough for food, coal and other essentials. Every extra penny was being saved to buy toys for the children at Christmas.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Cappadona was re-

luctant to smile. All of her upper teeth had been removed a few months earlier. She lacked the money to buy an upper plate. She did not have the \$42 the dentist wanted. Truly, this was a shame. They said when Mrs. Cappadona smiled, she was the most beautiful woman on Dorchester Avenue. Now all that beauty was gone.

The morning after the Allen show — on Christmas Eve, to be specific — Mrs. Cappadona received a telegram from her dentist. (She couldn't afford a phone.) The doctor wanted her in his office immediately.

"It's a good thing I made those impressions," said the dentist, as he placed the brand new set of uppers into Mrs. Cappadona's mouth. "You'll be able to enjoy a hearty Christmas dinner."

"I can't pay for these," the woman reminded him when she was able to talk. "I don't have \$42."

"The teeth are a Christmas gift," the dentist revealed. "They came from an old friend."

"I don't have any friends who can afford \$42 gifts," said Mrs. Cappadona as she was leaving the dentist's office.

"Yes you do," he assured her.

The woman smiled. It was truly beautiful. (Cappadona, it must be pointed out, was not her real name.)

Margaret O'Shea was another Dorchesterite who enjoyed the Allen radio show that Christmas week. She had every reason to be happy that night.

"Say, Jack, did Mary Livingstone come along with you?" Portland Hoffa, Allen's real-life wife asked Benny about his own real-life wife.

"No, Porty," Benny responded cheerfully. "She's busy with her Christmas shopping."

"Christmas shopping?"

"Yes," said Benny. "Right now she's over at a department store putting me

through bankruptcy.”

“That gives me an idea,” cooed Portland, hopefully. The studio audience chuckled, and then burst into laughter when Allen chimed in: “Steady, girl, steady.” In itself, the remark wasn’t funny, but when Allen said it, in that nasal twang of his, it was pure joy.

In her parlor, Margaret O’Shea – that wasn’t her real name – doubled up with laughter. She was a happy woman. Her husband was earning enough to get by on, and there would, after all, be gifts for young Tommy. They were concealed in a bedroom closet. Where they came from, she would never know. The doorbell had rung, and there was a messenger loaded down with Christmas toys, including the red fire engine her son had dreamed of owning.

Tommy, who was five, wanted to be a fireman. A few days before Christmas, the boy had been hit by a car near his home. It wasn’t the driver’s fault. The youngster came out of nowhere. The injuries were minor, and the boy spent only a day in the hospital. But the money used to pay hospital expenses left the family penniless. There wasn’t any money left to get Tommy his Christmas toys.

“I had saved that money to buy Tommy some toys,” the mother confided to her neighbor, Nellie O’Connell.

“Maybe something will come up,” Mrs. O’Connell declared. “Maybe there is really a Santa Claus out there, and maybe he will drop by your house this Christmas.”

Margaret O’Shea returned to her flat brokenhearted that day. As for Nellie O’Connell – and that was her real name – she headed across the street to confer with her good friend, Elizabeth Lovely – Fred Allen’s beloved Aunt Liz, the woman who raised him on Grafton Street in Dorchester after his parents died.

Elizabeth Lovely, Nellie O’Connell and Rev. William Ryan, pastor of St. Margaret’s



Church in Dorchester, are all gone now. So is Fred Allen. The great comedian passed away in 1956. The ending of this story, in which all four played key roles, can now be told. They were the ones responsible for the “mystery Christmas presents” delivered to countless Dorchester dwellings during the Depression years. In fact, in the 1940s, when there was prosperity, the gifts continued to be delivered to those who needed a helping hand.

“Fred Allen never forgot where he came from,” said Nellie’s son, Daniel. “One time, one of the kids on a local baseball team got hurt. Fred paid the medical bills and nobody ever knew he did.”

“Fred lived with his Aunt Liz, her husband Mike, and another aunt, Jane Herlihy. They lived on the second floor, and I lived on the first floor with my mom and dad. Fred was a good man, a kind man. He was always helping people. He never wanted to be thanked, though. Maybe that is why he did what he did so quietly. Every year during the Depression, Fred sent a check to his Aunt Liz. It always came a few weeks before Christmas, and it was always a

big check. Fred believed in sharing his blessings.

"There would be a note with the check. Fred always asked his aunt to check out families in the old neighborhood, and to help those who needed a helping hand at Christmas. He always wrote, 'Use your good judgment, Aunt Liz. You'll know the ones who really need help.'

"Then Mrs. Lovely would call my mother upstairs, and they'd swap information for an hour or so. After that, Aunt Liz and my mother would go over to our parish church, St. Margaret's, where they'd chat with Father Ryan, the pastor, for quite a while. He'd make some phone calls to other priests, and ministers and rabbis in the area, and eventually a list of people in need of help at

Christmas would be compiled."

"If there was a real emergency, Mrs. Lovely would go right over and hand the people some money," concluded Dan O'Connell. "In most cases, though, the gifts, or money, were sent anonymously. Those who needed help never knew where it came from."

Towards the end of his Christmas show many years ago, Fred Allen stepped out of character long enough to say: "From all of us here in the studio to all of you at home, may your Christmas be a joyous and blessed one."

If you are still alive, Clancy, and Mrs. Cappadona, and Margaret O'Shea, you now know the identity of your mystery Santa Claus of years ago.

He had baggy eyes. ■

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THE ANIMATED MUSE OF DR. SEUSS

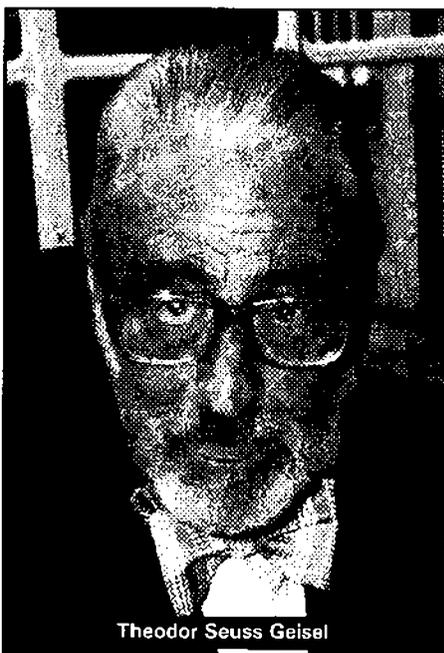
BY CURTIS L. KATZ

Anyone who has frequented libraries or bookstores in the last year knows by now that 2004 was celebrated as the "Seussentennial," the 100th anniversary year of the birth of Dr. Seuss. Seuss, of course, was the author of dozens of storybooks which, in galloping verse and quirky illustrations, told the tales of such whimsical characters as The Cat In The Hat, Horton the Elephant, Bartholomew Cubbins, the Sneetches, the Lorax, the Grinch, and others, delighting children and their parents for decades. But though he is beloved as an author of children's books and was accomplished in other creative endeavors as well, Dr. Seuss considered himself to be primarily a cartoonist. It is thus not surprising that animated cartoons were embraced by his career.

Theodor Seuss Geisel was born March 2, 1904, into a prosperous German-American family in Springfield, Massachusetts. He attended Dartmouth (Class of 1925), where he first appropriated his mother's maiden name (pronounced "Zoice" in the original German) as a pseudonym signed to his work published in the campus humor magazine. After a year at Oxford convinced him that he was not cut out for academia, Geisel appended the title "Dr." to "Seuss," memorializing the degree he did not receive in England.

His lack of degree or formal art training notwithstanding, Geisel attempted to make a living selling cartoons to popular magazines. His first big break occurred in 1928 when a Seuss cartoon that referred to the

Curtis L. Katz is a popular culture writer from Chicago, Illinois.



Theodor Seuss Geisel

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insect spray, Flit, came to the attention of the advertising executive who handled that product's account. For the next 17 years, Geisel handsomely augmented his income drawing humorous ads under the catch line, "Quick, Henry, the Flit!"

Geisel's first attempt at writing and illustrating a children's book, *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*, endured the rejections of 27 publishers before a Dartmouth classmate at Vanguard Press took a chance on it. Published in 1937, *Mulberry Street* was a modest success, and began the career of Dr. Seuss as a children's author, though his next few efforts, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, *The King's Stilts*, and *Horton Hatches The Egg*, initially did not equal the popularity of his first volume.

As war spread through Europe in 1940, Ted Geisel became impatient with America's failure to immediately take up arms against the Nazis. His views led to his assignment as editorial cartoonist for *PM*, the newly-established pro-Roosevelt, anti-isolationist, "popular front" New York newspaper backed primarily by Marshall Field III of Chicago. Throughout 1941 and 1942, *PM* afforded Dr. Seuss a bully pulpit from which to graphically air his views on Hitler and his sympathizers.

Having done his bit to get America into the war effort, Geisel felt morally obligated to do his bit *for* the war effort. In early 1943, Dr. Seuss joined the Army, receiving a commission as a captain in the 834th Signal Service Photographic Detachment — Frank Capra's Army motion picture unit. Here Theodor Geisel would earn distinction scripting serious wartime informational and indoctrination films. But his first assignment was as head of the animation and graphics section.

Actually, the business of film production and animation was utterly unfamiliar to Dr. Seuss, but Dr. Seuss was already quite familiar to the animators at Termite Terrace, the ramshackle home of Leon Schlesinger's Warner Brothers cartoon department. In 1941, animation director Bob Clampett persuaded the tight-fisted Schlesinger to purchase the rights to the 1940 Dr. Seuss story *Horton Hatches The Egg*, in which lazy bird Mayzie cons a kind and dutiful elephant into accepting the drudgery of sitting on her nest in a tree. According to Clampett, Schlesinger was dubious, concerned that "...if I filmed the book exactly as written, it would cause a big silent smile in the theaters, but wouldn't get any laughs." Pressed for time and anxious to produce audible mirth while retaining the spirit of Seuss in their cartoon, Clampett and story man Michael Maltese did not use the customary storyboard to script *Horton*,



but sketched gag ideas right into a copy of the book. Schlesinger need not have fretted. The resulting 1942 cartoon successfully melds the whimsy, rhyme, and visual style of Seuss with typically topical Merric Melodies gags: Horton stumbles through the enigmatic lyrics of "The Hut-Sut Song," and Mayzie breaks into Katharine Hepburn impersonations.

The success of Warner's *Horton Hatches The Egg* may have prompted Paramount to acquire the rights to the first two Dr. Seuss stories, *Mulberry Street* and *The 500 Hats*, which were brought to the screen in 1944 and 1943, respectively, by Hungarian-born puppet animator George Pal, as part of his Puppertoons series. The delightful Dr. Seuss stories combined with the toy-like charm of Pal's animation earned Oscar nominations for both films, though they each lost out to MGM Tom & Jerry cartoons.

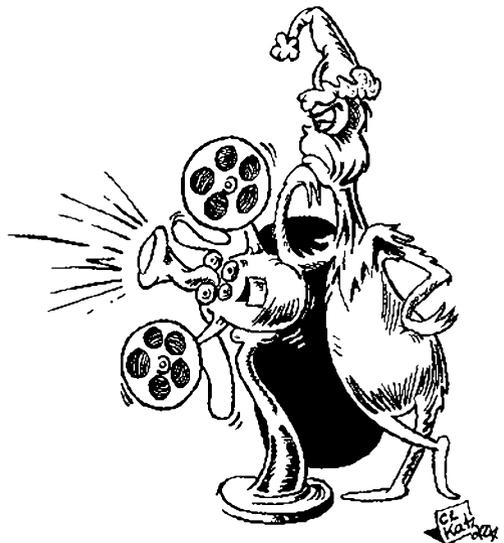
Meanwhile, back at Warner Brothers, Bob Clampett and other Termite Terrace denizens gained the opportunity to work directly with Dr. Seuss and indoctrinate him into the world of animation when Leon Schlesinger successfully outbid Walt Disney for a Signal Service contract to pro-

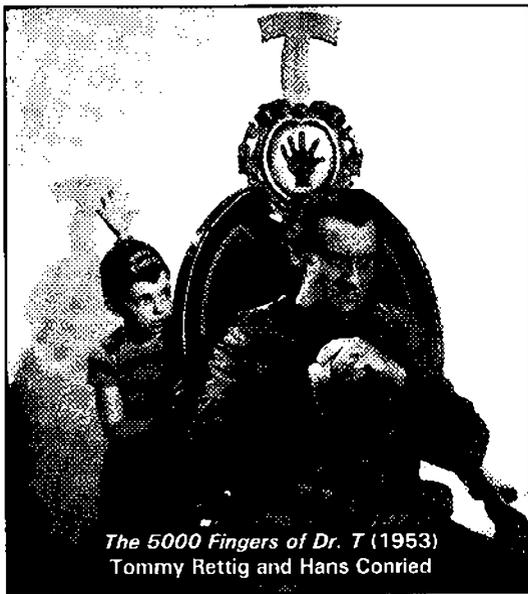
duce a series of five-minute black & white cartoons for *The Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, a twice-monthly 20-minute collection of newsreels and special features shown to American servicemen around the world. Ted Geisel and former Disney story man Phil Eastman became the principal writers for the cartoons, which starred Private Snafu, named for the GI acronym which, politely translated, stands for "Situation Normal: All Fouled Up." Lazy, arrogant, and vain, Snafu was an object lesson in how *not* to be a soldier. With the aid of his Technical Fairy, First Class (a cigar-chewing, pixie-size sergeant with wings, wand, and Brooklyn accent), and doses of earthy GI humor, Private Snafu taught by bad example the virtues of security, health, and discipline. A half-dozen of the earliest Snafu cartoons are written in rhymic and are clearly Geisel's work; he continued to write for the Snafu series until Frank Capra transferred him to other projects in March 1944.

Ted Geisel's tour of duty with Private Snafu acquainted Geisel not only with film

animation, but also with dozens of people who would become lifetime associates. Most notable was the close friendship forged with Warner Brothers animator Chuck Jones. Jones directed half of the total two dozen Snafu films produced 1943-1945, mentored Geisel in the art of animation, and would later gain notoriety as the creator of the durable Roadrunner & Coyote cartoons. The two men became a mutual admiration society, sharing common idiosyncrasies, a lunatic sense of humor, and similar views on art and literature. They even shared an affinity for bow ties, though differing adamantly on how ties should be looped.

After the war, Geisel remained close to the Hollywood film colony for several years. At lunch one day in 1950, Geisel's wartime collaborator Phil Eastman, who was then scripting Mr. Magoo cartoons for the new UPA (United Productions of America) studio, told him, "All the cartoons being made are obsolete. Mice keep outsmarting cats, and rabbits are always wiser than foxes. UPA has a fresh outlook. You





The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T. (1953)
Tommy Rettig and Hans Conried

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must have a story idea for us." He did. Geisel had recently sold to Capitol Records the story of Gerald McBoing Boing, a little boy who, because he utters sounds instead of speech, is ostracized by family and friends until he is discovered by the owner of the Bong-BONG-BONG Radio Station. The story was used in a series of children's records narrated by Harold Peary, radio's Great Gildersleeve. At Eastman's urging, Geisel took the record to the UPA studio, but was turned down by business manager Ed Gershman ("...we just don't do this kind of stuff."). Fortunately, as he was leaving, Geisel ran into producer Steve Bosustow, whom he knew from Frank Capra's Army film unit. Bosustow listened to the record, and bought the Mc Boing Boing story on the spot for \$500. Phil Eastman wrote the film adaptation with Bill Scott, who would later become the creative genius behind the Rocky & Bullwinkle TV cartoons. *Gerald McBoing Boing* won critical praise and an Oscar in 1951, and begot several sequels as well as a short-lived television show. The cartoon was hailed not only for its imaginative Dr. Seuss story, but also as a

showcase for UPA's avant-garde "limited design" style, which favored abstract graphics and bold color over traditional Disneyesque realism.

The success of *McBoing Boing* emboldened Ted Geisel to write and design a live-action feature film, *The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T.* (1953), produced by Stanley Kramer and starring Hans Conried as a fiendish piano teacher. The production and reception of the film were so disastrous that Geisel vowed never to become involved in another film project unless he was granted complete artistic control.

Dr. Seuss returned to writing children's books. The phenomenal success of his 1957 book *The Cat In The Hat*, revolutionized how children learned to read, multiplied the popularity of all Seuss books, and assured Dr. Seuss a permanent place in the pantheon of children's literature. But while Seuss's star was ascending, cartoon animation was in decline. By the early 1960s, most of the old theatrical cartoon studios were shuttered.

In 1965 two Warner Brothers cartoon alumni, Lee Mendelson and Bill Melendez, created a surprising sensation with television's first half-hour animated special, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, featuring characters from the popular *Peanuts* comic strip by Charles Schulz. Chuck Jones, hired the previous year by MGM to spearhead a lackluster revival of their cartoon department, realized there could be a bright future for animation in holiday TV specials, and recognized the Dr. Seuss story, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!*, as worthy subject matter for such a program. But Jones found his friend, Ted Geisel, a hard sell. Geisel still smarted from the *Dr. T.* fiasco, and *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!* had long languished in

the shadow of *The Cat In The Hat*, both books having debuted in 1957. Jones was certain that the Grinch story, about a curmudgeonly creature who is overtaken by the holiday spirit while attempting to despoil Christmas, would make an ideal holiday show, but Geisel consented to the project only when Jones assured his friend that they both would share equal creative control.

Jones later characterized his collaboration with Geisel as both "difficult" and "enjoyable." Geisel was a compulsive perfectionist, while Jones had an established set of "disciplines" he applied to cartoon storytelling. There were many creative issues to be argued. How should a story that takes twelve minutes to read aloud be made to fill a TV half-hour? What color should the Grinch be? (He was black & white in the book.) How should he move? Jones was determined to make the mean Grinch (whose "heart was two sizes too small") even meaner; eventually he took on some aspects of Jones's villainous but vulnerable Wile E. Coyote. There were production problems: MGM was unenthusiastic, as were potential sponsors. But there were also delights: Ted Geisel reveled in writing song lyrics for the show, and enjoyed working with Hollywood's favorite boogeyman, Boris Karloff, who narrated the story. As Geisel recalled, Karloff "took the script and studied it for a week as if it were Shakespeare. He figured out all the nuances. That's one of the reasons why it works so well."

How The Grinch Stole Christmas! first aired Sunday, December 18, 1966, in the 7:00 PM slot on CBS usually scheduled for *Lassie*. *The New York Times* and *Variety* took a Scrooge's view of the film; the latter headlined, "The Grinch -- It Not Only Stole Xmas But Picked CBS' Pocket For \$315,000." Chuck Jones's insistence on full animation, instead of the corner-

cutting limited animation techniques then prevalent on TV, did make *The Grinch* one of the most expensive TV half-hours to date. But warm audience response made it a success, and repeated telecasts plus the advent of home video have made the Chuck Jones *Grinch* film and the Dr. Seuss *Grinch* book among the most enduring of modern Christmas entertainment traditions.

How The Grinch Stole Christmas! launched Chuck Jones into the production of TV specials and renewed Ted Geisel's enthusiasm for animation. There ensued a string of Dr. Seuss TV specials, most notably: *Horton Hears A Who*, 1970, directed by Chuck Jones; *The Cat In The Hat*, 1971, by Chuck Jones and another Warner Brothers refugee, Hawley Pratt, and *The Lorax*, 1972, by Warner veteran Friz Freleng. *The Grinch* and *Horton* received Peabody Awards, and *The Lorax* was awarded honors at the prestigious annual Zagreb International Animation Festival.

Theodor Geisel remained fascinated by cartoon animation to the end of his long life. When he died in September 1991, he left a script for an animated TV special called *Daisy-Head Mayzie*, and had been working for over a year on a feature-length animated adaptation of his last (1990) book, *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*

Many tributes have been offered throughout this last year to Mr. Geisel and Dr. Seuss, most of them rightly focused on the Dr. Seuss books and their contribution to child literacy. But as this holiday season brings to a close the year of the Seussentennial, and we gather around the TV to yet again enjoy *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!*, let us raise a mug of egg-nog and offer this toast:

So here's to the Seuss,
Famed for writing rhymed pages,
Who could also produce
Cartoon fun for all ages. ■

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Who Was That Lady?

BY WALTER SCANNELL

We were watching an old movie on television when suddenly there appeared in close-up the movies' one and only deadpan singer, and my wife asked, "What's her name?"

"Ummm," I said, reluctant to concede that I do not know absolutely everything, "an MGM contract player." I pulled the bluff off without batting an eye.

But the question nagged at me, so I found out a little about Virginia O'Brien, who managed to be both overused and underused by MGM and who married the movies' first Superman.

Virginia was born in April 1921 (the studio biography lied by a year), the daughter of a Los Angeles Police captain of detectives and grandchild of the city's longtime postmaster. Since her mother's brother was film director Lloyd Bacon (later to make *42nd Street* and *Knute Rockne, All-American*), the family naturally expected Virginia to be in films. She was raven-haired and sort of cute but not pretty, and although she liked to dance, her best gift was comedy.

The young woman's first appearance on stage made her career, if we are to believe a studio account that sounds manufactured. The story goes that when Virginia was in

Walter Scannell is a history buff and nostalgia fan from Chicago.



Virginia O'Brien

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the musical *Meet the People* with the Los Angeles Assistance League Players in 1939, she froze up, her body and expression immovable. The legend says that among those howling with laughter in the audience was Louis B. Mayer, and he quickly signed her to a contract. More likely, Virginia developed her deadpan delivery as a satire on singers, and perhaps Uncle Lloyd told someone at MGM, "You got to see this girl, she'll crack you up."

Like many singers, Virginia had a musical way of phrasing as she spoke, and she also had a knack for throwing out put-downs and other one-liners. But before she appeared in her first film, she had to get studio permission to go on the New York stage for an eight-month run in *Keep Off the Grass* with Jimmy Durante and Ray Bolger. No one before had delivered a song in a way that would make composers tear their hair out. As the respected New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson said, Virginia "convulsed the audience by removing the ecstasy from high-pressure music."

Then it was back to California for her 1940 screen debut as a wisecracking manicurist in the forgettable Frank Morgan film *Hullabaloo*. Missed that, have you? And if

you didn't see her in the Walter Pidgeon private eye mystery *Sky Murder* that same year, you're not alone. Her first successful movie came next, as a sales clerk adding to the insanity in the Marx Brothers' *The Big Store*.

Virginia finally received billing in *Ringside Maisie* (1941), one of a series of *Maisie* films with Ann Sothern. Later that year she worked on *Lady Be Good* with Red Skelton, still unfamiliar to most moviegoers but whose career for the next few years was tied in with hers.

When Red went to Hollywood, he took his curly-haired friend Kirk Alyn with him. Alyn, born John Feggo in New Jersey in 1910, was a former Broadway chorus boy and dancer who must have thought there had to be a place for him in movies. Perhaps through Skelton, Virginia met Alyn and the two hit it off. In 1942, the year of making *Panama Hattie* with Red and Ann Sothern, Virginia and Kirk were married.

The mid-'40s were Virginia's heyday. In addition to making several movies a year, she shared the radio waves with Groucho Marx and former Jack Benny singer Kenny Baker on the comedy-variety program *Blue Ribbon Town* in 1943. The program never reached a second season. Then it was back to gimmicky roles in films. Readers of a fan magazine supposedly voted her "Miss Red Hot Poker Face" (that sounds like a studio invention.)

Since Virginia had all the talent in the family, Kirk Alyn went from studio to studio looking for bit parts. Look fast and you might spot him in *Lucky Jordan* with Alan Ladd escaping Nazi agents, not a good film but the best Kirk would appear in. Unless you prefer *Pistol Packin' Mama* or Shirley Temple's *Little Miss Broadway*.

Virginia kept the paychecks coming by appearing in three more Red Skelton films, *Ship Ahoy*, *Du Barry Was a Lady* (where she sings "Salome"), and *The Show-Off*. In the 1944 film of *Meet the People* with Lucille Ball, Virginia played Woodpecker Pcg, the welder, singing "Say That We're Sweethearts Again" at the shipyard rally.

There was no limit to how often a studio could assign a contract performer to a film in a single year, and in 1946 Virginia was shoe-horned into *Ziegfeld Follies*, *The Harvey Girls* with Judy Garland, *The Show-Off*, and *Till the Clouds Roll By*. Audiences liked Virginia O'Brien but knew her as just that deadpan girl – and MGM may have wanted to keep it that way. In singing or dancing she was no match for Katherine Grayson, Eleanor Powell or Ann Miller. What she had was a gimmick. Perhaps if MGM had nurtured her career, Virginia might have become someone with a name.

As an overused presence in films, Virginia no doubt wanted real parts. Finally she was given a leading-lady role opposite



Panama Hattie (1942)
Red Skelton and Virginia O'Brien

PHOTOEST

her personal friend Red Skelton in *Merton of the Movies*. In 1947 it must have sounded like a real opportunity, but the result is painful to watch.

The story has an inept actor put in a serious silent movie as a last-minute replacement for a drunken star, in the hope that the result will be funny. But the rich years of Hollywood had ended in 1946, and theaters were starting to close across the country. The budget for the film was kept low and the project was given to choreographer Robert Alton, probably to stop him from asking that he get to direct. Alton filmed the comedy sluggishly and without flair. Making the movie worse, Virginia, playing a stunt woman, is asked to show love for Red Skelton and yet suggest that the studio dupe him. Now, how could anyone play that?

Dressed in period costume and done up as a leading lady, Virginia was moderately attractive and hardly resembled her former, deadpan character. She played her thank-

less role just well enough, then retired. She had been in 16 films in seven years, with perhaps only *The Big Store* and *The Harvey Girls* to be proud of.

Kirk Alyn and Virginia made a good couple but their marriage became rocky. In 1948, he finally grabbed the lead of something, Columbia Picture's 15-part serial *Superman* cranked out for the Saturday afternoon kiddie crowd. He was 37 and not particularly muscular, but at least he had dark hair and because of his dancer's training he could move gracefully. Little-known actress Noel Neill (who some people thought was a little like Virginia) was Lois Lane, and Jack Larson played cub reporter Jimmy Olson.

Being in serials was nothing new to Alyn. He had been in *Daughter of Don Q* the year before, and after his stint as the Man of Steel he was in *Federal Agents vs. Underworld, Inc.* and *Radar Patrol vs. Spy King*. Then he was back in cape and tights in 1950 in *Atom Men vs. Superman*. His final se-



DuBarry Was A Lady (1943)

Gene Kelly, Lucille Ball, Red Skelton, Virginia O'Brien, Tommy Dorsey

PHOTOFEST



with Sally Rand and singers Cass Daley, Allan Jones and the Ink Spots.

Virginia did a few guest spots on television shows hosted by Steve Allen, Ed Sullivan and Merv Griffin. Her last appearance before the cameras was briefly in the Disney movie *Gus* – about a football-kicking mule – in 1976. Then she worked a little in the-

rial was in *Blackhawk* in 1952.

Two years later the Alyn-O'Brien marriage ended but apparently Virginia still loved him; at least she seems to have said only nice things about him. Alyn became bitter about his failure to reach success on his own and sometimes blamed it on his being typecast as Superman. He retired and lived in Arizona and then Texas but returned to the screen one more time, as Lois Lane's father in the Christopher Reeve *Superman*, one of the biggest hits of 1978. He self-published an autobiography and filed (and lost) a \$10 million suit against a mock *Superman* cartoon that he said resembled him. He died in a hospital near Houston in 1999.

Virginia came out of retirement in 1955 for *Francis Joins the Navy*, starring Donald O'Connor and a talking mule. In the list of credits, Virginia came in 13th. One of her friends, Ann Southern, arranged for her to have a guest part in an episode of the TV situation comedy *Private Secretary*. After that, Virginia hit the nostalgia trail. In 1972 she played a few towns with Rudy Vallee in a review called *The Big Show of 1928*, which merged with another called *The Big Show of 1936*, where she shared the boards

aters and nightclubs through the 1980s.

Virginia O'Brien died in January 2001 at the age of 80 in the Motion Picture and Television Hospital in Woodland Hills, Los Angeles.

She was one of the most frequently seen movie performers whose name few ever knew. ■

Tune in TWTD January 29 to hear Virginia O'Brien on radio.

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CHICAGO— Please note my change of address and update your records so that I won't miss a single issue of *Nostalgia Digest*. I read each and every article and always learn some fact that's new to me about the golden years of radio. With the current Autumn issue it struck me just how much more enjoyable the reading is thanks to all the wonderful photos that accompany the articles. My thanks to whomever is putting in the time to hunt down the pictures used in the magazine.

(ED. NOTE— You're welcome.)

WILMETTE, IL— I thought the enclosed copy of my diary entry at age 14, dated October 28, 1944, would be of interest to Bob Perlongo who wrote "Memories of 1944" in the Autumn issue:

"Cold in the evening. At 6 p.m. Doc and I went to the Soldier's Field and saw the president. We were in Gate 5 and the president passed right near us. I shouted and waved and it looked like he looked right at me!! There were no reserved seats and you needed no tickets!! Doc and I walked around until we found 2 seats. There was a mass of people. Doc and the rest of the drivers (about 50-100) parked their cars right on the Outer drive. At 9:00 the speech was over and Doc and I had to go through moving cars and got mixed up. Finally, at 9:45 p.m. we got home."

I still remember that chilly evening at Soldier Field when President Roosevelt "looked at me!" "Doc" was my uncle, a captain in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, who was rooming with us at that time in Hyde Park, South Side, Chicago.

—SOL SPECTOR

(ED. NOTE— Thanks for the wonderful memory.)

KANKAKEE, IL— Just got my Fall *Digest* and the stories look great. Have been with you since the beginning and have always enjoyed your program. I have to listen on line as I cannot receive you on the air and I have an antenna that is 70 feet high. I noticed that the fall issue was missing the "star birthday" section. Too bad. I really

enjoyed that section. What happened? Keep on broadcasting. —**DARWIN JAENICKE**
(ED. NOTE— We carried a full year's worth of "Radio Star Birth Dates" in our 2004 issues. We felt that to continue would be redundant. However, in this Winter, 2005 issue you will find the listing of a number of radio-related performers who were born 100 years ago, in 1905. See page 28 and then, if you'd like to see Ron Sayles' complete listing of birth (and death) dates of show business personalities, visit his web page. The address is provided at the end of the list. Speaking of Ron Sayles, read on:

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN— Got your latest (Autumn, 2004) edition of *Nostalgia Digest*. Enjoyed the article about Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland, but author Wayne Klatt made an error that is all too common. He states that Judy Garland was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Judy was born in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. I know this for a fact because a few years ago I visited the little hamlet of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and visited the house in which she was born. They also have a large Judy Garland section in the Historical Society building. —**RON SAYLES**

NILES, IL— You probably have been aware of the error in Walter Scannell's piece "Crooners" (Autumn, 2004). Joe Williams was with the Basie band in the fifties and early sixties. As far as I know he never fronted the Ellington band. He and Basie had some very great albums during those years.

—BUD NICHOLS

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA— I love the magazine and the radio show and the Jack Benny CDs, — but good grief, if Walter Scannell doesn't know the difference between Duke Ellington and Count Basie how can we be expected to believe anything in his article? Couldn't it have been caught?

—SAM LEVENE

(ED. NOTE— Mr. Scannell does indeed know that Joe Williams sang with Count Basie, but somehow his typing finger punched out Ellington and no one on our crack editing staff caught the error. We've

given ourselves twenty lashes with an old Basie 78 r.p.m. recording.)

WESTCHESTER, IL— Richard Hayes' story on Kate Smith in your Autumn, 2004 issue reminded me of a concert the great Kate gave in the late '60s on Mother's Day at the Arie Crown Theatre in the old McCormick Place. The standing-room-only audience probably expected a great legend somewhat past her prime singing her great songs from the 1930s and '40s. Wrong. Kate Smith strode on stage slim, glamorous and contemporary in a decidedly expensive and lavish colorful sequined evening gown and announced that anyone who came for nostalgia had come to the wrong place. She would be singing the Beatles, Michel Legrand and Henry Mancini and she would be joined on stage by a troupe of singing and dancing young performers, The Kids Next Door. "I've always liked to be surrounded by young talent," she said.

Whereupon she launched into a marathon concert which proved she could sing George Harrison as adeptly as she could sing George Gershwin. In magnificent voice, animated, obviously enjoying herself tremendously, she sang, she danced, she told wonderful stories and got ovation after ovation. She saved all the hits for a long medley at show's end and when she sang "God Bless America" it was in a medley with "Sing" from *Sesame Street*. I think a lot of us in the audience realized the Songbird of the South could have come on stage in a simple black dress and planted herself before a microphone and we would have all been happy. Not for her. She presented a total extravaganza with the emphasis on current music. She said she loved rock and loved to sing it because "I always loved a good beat."

Her awe-inspiring endurance as a top-rank star for more than 40 years on stage, on radio, on television and occasionally in films attests to her talent and her smarts. She'd be a good role model for anyone entering show business today. —**WAYNE BRASLER**

JOLIET, IL— I cannot begin to tell you how much I look forward to each issue, and listening every Saturday. I even installed an FM antenna on a TV/Ham radio tower to be sure I get noise-free reception. While your broadcasts are A+ and very good, the *Nostalgia Digest* makes them GREAT!

—**FRANK AND LOIS RASMUSSEN**

ELMHURST, IL— Usually I'm not fond of when you dedicate continuous weeks to a single star [on *Those Were The Days*] but the Al Jolson Month (August 2004) was an exception for me. I found each episode fully enjoyable, especially his Steve Allen Show appearance. I'd like to hear more of Steve doing his radio show if you have others in your closet. Thanks for the great entertainment each week. —**KEN DIETZ**

GLEN ELLYN, IL— I heard some of your "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" show on September 25th. I caught little bits of it while moving around in my car. I heard most of "Baseball Hattie," which I enjoyed. And then on the way to work I heard the baseball game broadcast. I tuned in after your introduction of it. At first I wondered why you were playing it. I thought, "Is this an old time radio broadcast? No, it sounds too good!" Then I picked up a player's name (Wambsgans) that I have seen in print, but who is not a current player and the comment that Babe Ruth was at the game. When I finally heard that it was a sound re-creation of a 1920 World Series baseball game, I couldn't believe it— right down to the crowd noise and the crack of the bat! Those two guys doing the call (Mike Snyder, Bob Becker) had to be brilliant to do that well while sitting in a sound studio. It sounded so similar to Pat and Ron doing the Cubs' call. How can we know that much about what happened during that game? I don't even like baseball that much, and that blew me away. That was brilliant work. My warm congratulations to everyone involved. —**DAVE CONDON**

(ED. NOTE)— We played only a few excerpts from the fifth game of the 1920 World Series between Cleveland and Brooklyn. The complete re-creation, called "Showdown at League Park," is available on a set of two CDs for \$23.70 from October Productions, Box 202682, Cleveland, Ohio 44120.)

ORLAND PARK, IL— I am a big fan of the newspaper segment on *TWTD*. Having Ken Alexander join the show on a regular basis was a great idea. After all these years, *TWTD* remains the highlight of my Saturday afternoons. —**GARRETT BLATT**

CANADA— Just listened to *TWTD* V-Discs show (September 4, 2004). What a fabulous programme! Thank you so much.



MORE MAIL

Not that I was in the military, or even in North America in the war years. Heck, I was only four at the end of the war and in England, to boot! But I do know what V-Discs were and what a collection you presented. George Spink recommended that his listeners take in your broadcast through www.tuxjunction.net another fabulous group of web sites. (When you get there, click on "Enter") The man is a genius. Once again, thanks so much.

-AL WESTWOOD

DARIEN, IL- Thank you for your great radio show each Saturday afternoon. It comes at a time when I am either doing some work around the house or running errands. I was born in 1940 and I often heard my father talk about the great radio shows of the past and it is a real treat to hear many of them

for the first time. The quality of the content is excellent. My son Michael and daughter Celeste have enjoyed your shows as well. Please keep up the good work and I look forward to listening to your programs for many years to come. -**JOHN AGUZINO (ED. NOTE)**- Thanks. We hope -and expect- to be here for many years to come, too.)

LAKE GENEVA, WISCONSIN- Just want to thank you and Ken Alexander for 30 years of listening pleasure. I have a cassette tape of a show in which you played Disney's "Pinocchio" with a recording date of 1974. I was 26 at the time. My children and grandchildren played that tape until the tape snapped from wear. I believe I may have started listening to you earlier, but I never paid attention to the date. I just enjoyed your selections. My children and grandchildren know the Cinnamon Bear and Superman because of you. You brought us closer together.

When I moved up to Lake Geneva, I built a tower to catch the WNIB-FM signal better. What a sense of loss I experienced when I heard WNIB was sold. My friends told me

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Morgan, Ginny Simms, Andrews Sisters, Dennis Day, Vera Vague, Eddy Duchin, Harry Von Zell. **JACK BENNY** (2-17-46) Rochester turns up after been lost at sea for two days. **GI JOURNAL** (4-23-45) Jack Benny, Paulette Goddard, Ginny Simms, Mel Blanc, Eddie Anderson, and Arthur Treacher who takes Rochester's place as Benny's butler. **JACK BENNY** (2-12-50) In the absence of the Sportsmen, Rochester suggests the Ink Spots do the Lucky Strike commercial. **JACK BENNY** (12-3-50) Jack's version of how he met Rochester

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NECROLOGY OF 2004

Due to the *Nostalgia Digest's* quarterly schedule, the annual listing of entertainers and personalities who died during the preceding year will be published in the Spring issue of this magazine. The Necrology of 2004 will appear shortly after January 1, 2005 on our website www.nostalgia Digest.com

you were on WDCB and now I can catch you on Saturdays again via the Internet when I can.

I enjoy Ken's impersonations and his readings from his newspaper archives. Sometimes I tape them and share them with my relatives from Iowa or those who don't use a computer. Who would believe gasoline at 26 cents per gallon or cigarettes at 26 cents per pack? Who would believe a doctor recommending a cigarette brand because tests showed they didn't do any harm to the throat after six months of smoking? Who would believe a man's suit with a vest and two pair of pants for only \$39.95? Who would believe men wore suits and women wore dresses and hats to a baseball game? -AL FLEMING
(ED. NOTE-I think Ken still has a suit he bought years ago for \$39.95.)

NORTH AURORA, IL- What a treasure these old radio shows are! I enjoy your show and the interviews with the stars, the history of that era, and the memories. As a small child, I would come home from school and my mother would have damp laundry hanging in the utility room to dry and homemade soup on the stove. She would let my little brother and me listen to our favorite radio show while waiting for supper. I can almost smell the soup now. These are the fond thoughts your show brings back. What a great way to spend a Saturday afternoon in our busy world. Thanks for the memories. -MARGE TOPEL

ELGIN, IL- I count myself among the lucky ones who made our move here way back in 1986. Your show has been one of the highlights of my life. Being born in 1943, I don't remember the great shows. It sure is fun to recommend your show and what a conversation opener when I meet some of our older clients and ask them what their favorite radio show was and then send them a tape of that show. -JO ANN LAGONI

ST. CHARLES, IL- Thanks for giving your presentation of old time radio at the Antique Radio Club of Illinois Radiofest this year. I thoroughly enjoyed everything that you shared, but I especially enjoyed your reminiscences of your favorite childhood radio shows. I can just imagine you kids running home from school weekday afternoons to catch the latest action-adventure show! You also mentioned an "over-the-counter" medicine that I never heard of before. "Tonsilene," is what you called it. I'm sure it was a noxious substance for a school-aged boy to take. As I remember, Vicks Vaporub was the de facto product my mother wanted me to use when I was home sick with a cold. And it was just as repulsive as Tonsilene, I'm sure. Again, thanks for a very enjoyable presentation. -DOUG FOX

(ED. NOTE- Tonsilene was just one of those patent medicines that my mother administered whenever I had a cold, a cough or other such childhood ailment. We were often given castor oil (which also had a terrible taste). Vicks was ever-present in our home and I can still smell it after having my mother rub it on my chest, my back, on my nose, even *in* my nose. Someone once suggested that a little dab of Vicks, placed under the tongue, would help cure a sore throat - as if Tonsilene wasn't punishment enough. Thankfully, my mother didn't subscribe to that theory. Ahhh, those were the days!)

LIVONIA, MICHIGAN- When I was a school kid and lived in the south suburbs of Chicago, I used to listen to you on WXFM, WNIB, WBBM and WAIT. I even strained to hear a little of your show occasionally in the early days on WLTD- next to inaudible down in Hometown. A few weeks ago I discovered that you were streaming your show from WDCB, and I connected to it over the Internet. I can't tell you what a delight it was to listen to you and Ken



STILL MORE MAIL

Alexander (whom I remember from listening to WAIT as a kid: "The warmth and tenderness of the world's most beautiful music") reminiscing over a copy of an old newspaper from the 1940s. Keep up the good work and congratulations on having a program that can be heard worldwide!

— JERRY WEICHBRODT

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA— I've been a long-time reader of *Nostalgia Digest* and since I got cable modem a couple of years ago I've been able to listen to your show quite often. However, there were times due to work I would miss one and it seems that was always the time you had either a bunch of (or just one) show that I wanted to hear. Anyway, I have heard you mention your web site many times but never visited. Imagine my joy a few minutes ago to learn that previous shows are available on demand. An answer to a prayer. Thank you very much. I know now I should have visited you sooner. —JOE MACKEY

AUSTIN, TEXAS— I am now listening to your program from eight days ago and it is playing beautifully and without the constant interruptions I've experienced during the last few years (while trying to tune in "live"). What a delight! —BILL URSCHEL

BRADENTON, FLORIDA— Thanks for mentioning my name on the air last Saturday. It was such a nice surprise to hear it on the radio. Yes, I do listen to your show down here in Florida every week, much as I have for the past 25 years! Thank goodness for the Internet. I receive you "loud and clear," actually, better than I did living in Bartlett, Illinois.

—RON MARUSCAK

(ED. NOTE)— In addition to our "live" broadcasts each week from 1-5 pm Central time at www.wdcb.org the Saturday show begins streaming the following Tuesday and is available on demand, 24 hours a day, for one week, after which the next Saturday show takes its place. For more information see the announcement on page 32 or visit our web site: www.nostalgiaadigest.com

CHICAGO— I really enjoy your *TWTD* programs on College of DuPage station WDCB and I appreciate both your and Ken Alexander's dialogue on various subjects. Also, I'm very glad that both of you are trying to eliminate the horrible habit of saying "Oh" for the number zero, although you have slipped a little during the last couple of weeks. But, hang in there, kiddo.

—BERNARD W. WHITE

E-MAIL— I want to tell you how much I enjoy your program on Saturday afternoons. If I am unable to sit down and listen to the whole four hours, I will tape it and listen during the week. You have a great variety of programs which is like opening up a gift each week. I am a retired speech language pathologist and I just have to let you know how you "drive me crazy" with your pronunciation of "birthday." I have listened to your program for hours and each time you pronounce it without the "d" sound, I shout to the radio, "Chuck, it's DAY" not "birthay." I guess you didn't hear me. I thought that you would get a charge out of that. Enjoy your programs... keep them coming. —CHARLENE MacGREGOR
(ED. NOTE)— I guess I haven't heard you when you shouted to me about my pronunciation of the word "birthday." I didn't realize that I do not pronounce the "d" distinctly. I'll try to work on it, but it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. Perhaps I'll change my behavior by Jack Benny's next birthDay on Valentine's Day.)

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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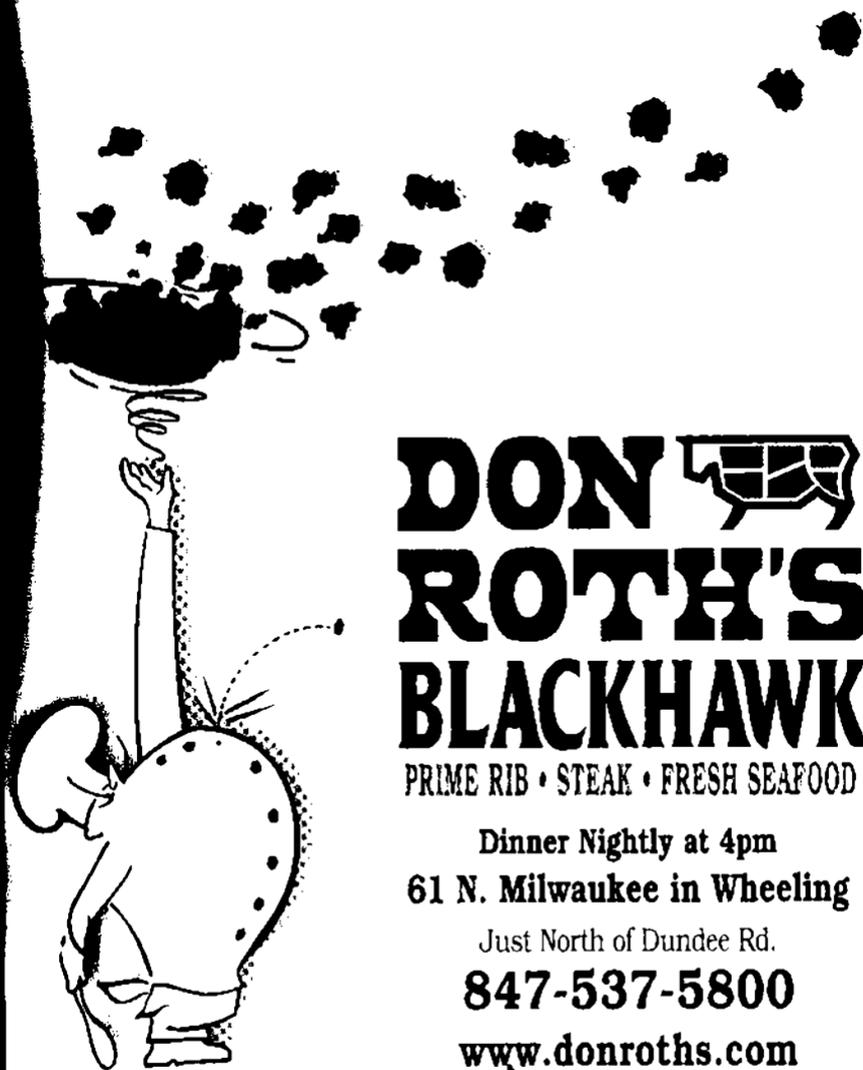
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on television featured many performers who appeared on radio during the Golden Age. Ken Alexander recognizes the "Radio Folks in Mayberry" on page 54.

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