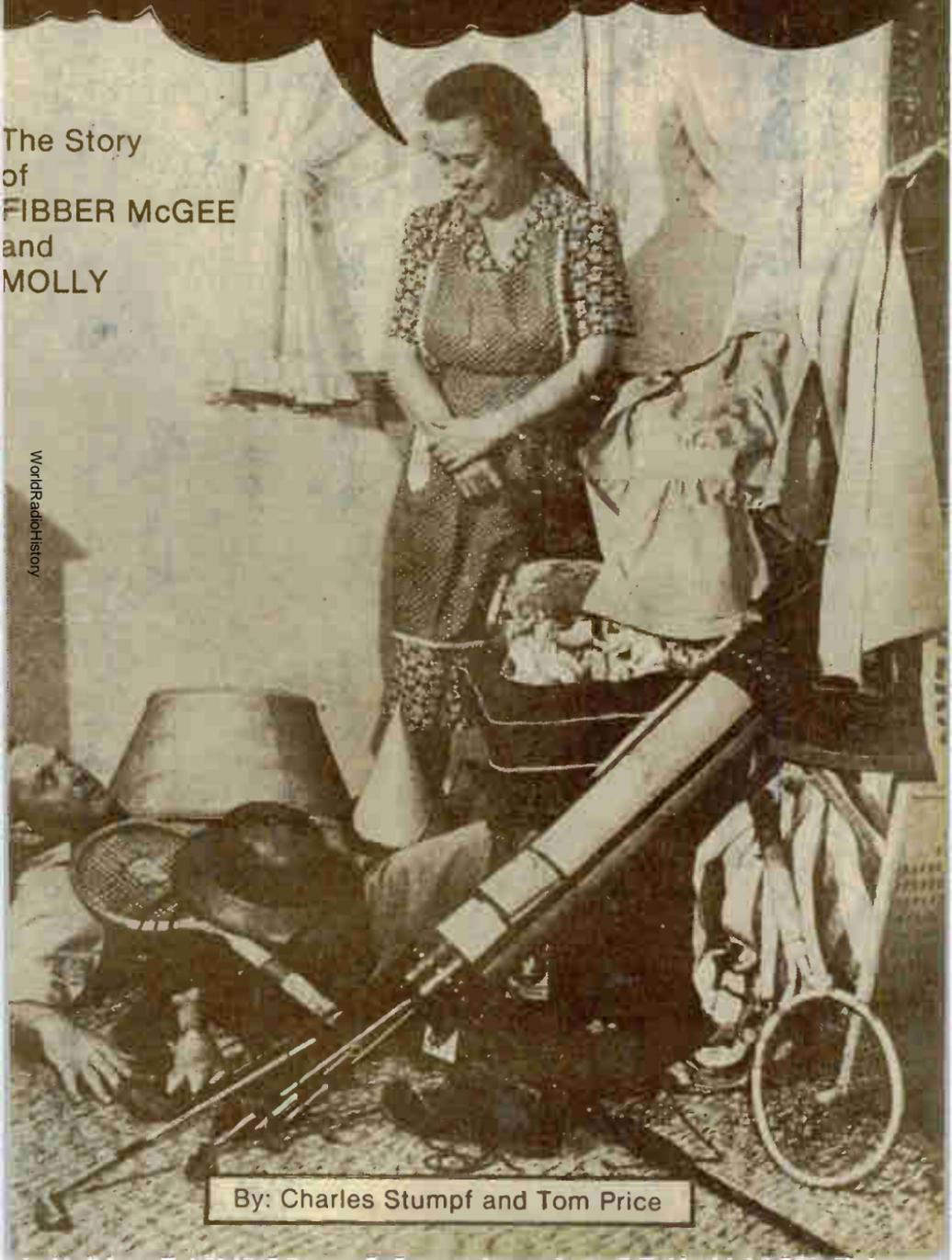


# Heavenly Days!

The Story  
of  
FIBBER McGEE  
and  
MOLLY

WorldRadioHistory



By: Charles Stumpf and Tom Price

# HEAVENLY DAYS!

The Story of  
Fibber McGee and Molly  
by  
Charles Stumpf  
and  
Tom Price

The World of Yesterday  
Route 3, Box 263-H  
Waynesville, NC 28786  
1987

**Dedicated with Loving Gratitude  
to the Memory of:  
Marian (Molly) Jordan  
and  
Jim (Fibber McGee) Jordan**

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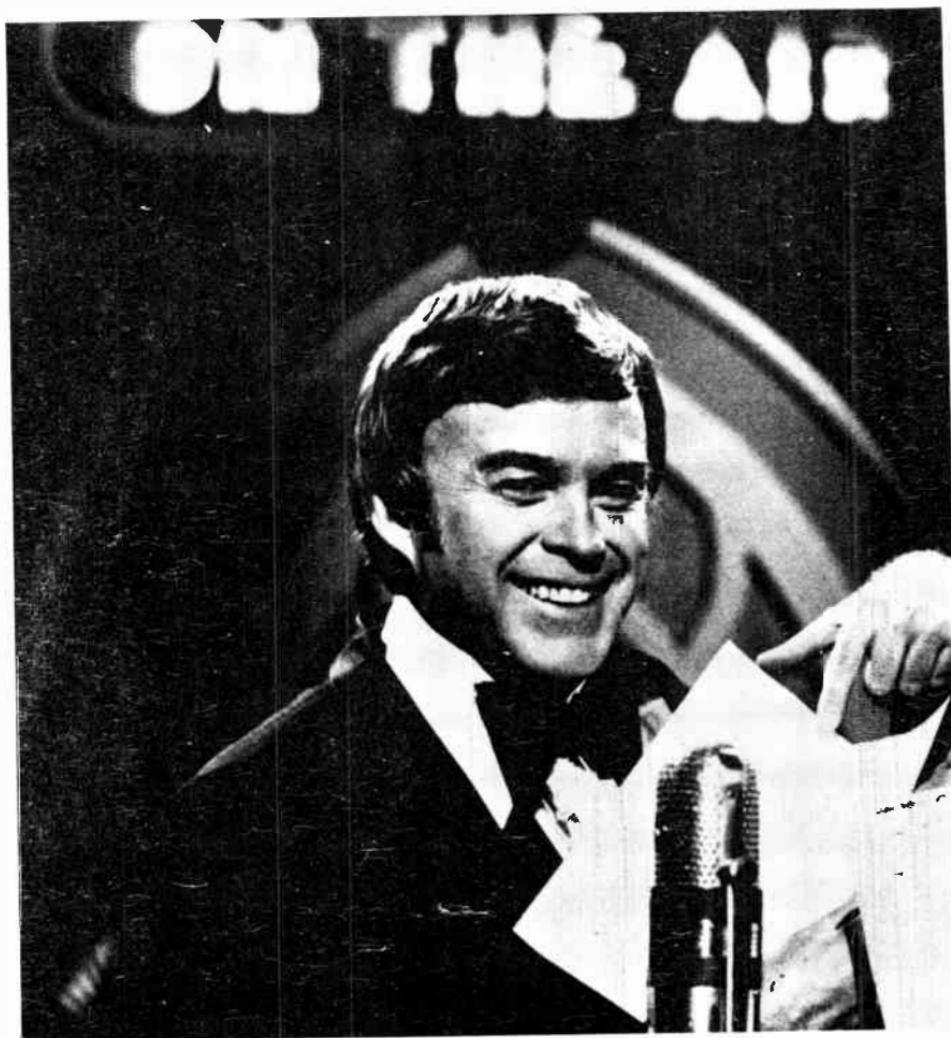
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Special Drawings depicting 'Smackout' by Gene Larson



Frank Breese has been active in the radio and television industry for more than forty years. He began as a child actor on shows that originated from Hollywood and appeared on many of the top coast-to-coast programs during the 1940's including: Lux Radio Theatre, Major Hoople, Blondie, The Billie Burke Show and was heard as 'Little Beaver' on the popular Red Ryder radio series. In January 1967 Breese began a program on AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Service). His show "The Golden Days of Radio," now in its 20th year, presents popular radio shows and personalities from the 40's, 50's and 60's. A former president of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters, Breese was nominated for an Emmy for his CBS-TV special "Golden Days of Radio."

## FOREWORD

by Frank Bresee

I have always felt that radio and I grew up together. Amos 'n' Andy appeared on their first network broadcast on August 19, 1929, and the next day I was born. Two months later Rudy Vallee began The Fleishmann Hour, radio's first variety show, and within the next few years, most of the popular comedians and dramatic shows were introduced to the radio airwaves. Will Rogers, at that time known as America's leading cowboy humorist, columnist, stage and screen star, said: "Radio is too big of a thing to be out of." He was RIGHT!

When Fibber McGee and Molly began broadcasting on network radio in 1935, audiences soon knew they had discovered something very special. Later when the McGee's moved their show from Chicago to the West Coast, their ratings continued to climb on the charts. In early 1941 the McGee show topped Bob Hope, Jack Benny and Edgar Bergen to become the Number One Program in the whole county!

The first time I saw Jim Jordan was at the NBC Studios at Sunset and Vine in Hollywood. The year was 1941 and I was appearing as Alvin on the Major Hoople program which was broadcast on the NBC Blue Network every Tuesday afternoon at 4 o'clock. A few hours later, Fibber McGee and Molly broadcast their show 'live' coast-to-coast from Studio A. It became a privilege for me to finish my broadcast and then watch their show. I know that those special Tuesdays will be a part of my happiest memories for the rest of my life.

Jim and his wife Marian were pioneers in radio and this wonderful book traces their careers from the early beginnings through Radio's Golden Age.

Jim continues to be active today (at a very young 90) and is chairman of the board of the prestigious Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters Club, which is an organization that includes almost 1,000 members of the Radio and Television Industry. He continues to be active in radio and during the past ten years he has appeared on various programs, from the Mutual Radio Theatre to an occasional guest spot on television. Whenever Jim has joined me on my show "The Golden Days of Radio," listeners from all over the world have written in to voice their approval.

The days of Fibber McGee and Molly are fondly remembered on these pages. Their comedy was bright and fun, and is just as timeless in its appeal today, as it was more than a half century ago.



Cheerful cherub. The long golden curls and twinkling eyes belong to eighteen month old James Edward Jordan, born in a white farmhouse atop Kickapoo Hill, just west of Peoria, Illinois. (April, 1898).

HEAVENLY DAYS:

THE STORY OF  
FIBBER Mc GEE AND MOLLY

**THE EARLY YEARS**

THE  
**Templeton Quartette**

PIANO  
NUMBERS  
A  
SPECIAL  
FEATURE



EACH  
ONE  
A  
TRAINED  
SOLOIST

and Entertainers

A Real Treat for Lovers of  
**GOOD MUSIC**

WILL APPEAR AT

J. E. JORDAN, Mgr.



601 Bradley Ave., Peoria, Ill.

'The Templeton Quartet' was Jim Jordan's first effort in organizing a music vocal team. Jim (2nd from left) sang tenor and managed the group for six months. Other members of the group: Ed Ellis, John Hanson and Paul Muehlenbeck. (1917)

## In the Beginning . . .

It had been a "heavenly day" and the fates must have been smiling down that November 16th evening of 1896 when a bouncing grey-eyed baby boy was born to the Jordan family in their white farmhouse atop Kickapoo Hill, just west of Peoria, Illinois.

The baby was christened "James Edward," but he was destined to make his mark in the world under a different name--one firmly established in the annals of radio's Golden Age--FIBBER McGEE.

A year-and-a-half later, on April 5, 1898, about three miles from the Jordan farm, it proved to be a "heavenly day" for the Driscoll family, for they welcomed a beautiful blue-eyed daughter. They named her "Marian," but she was to be known to the world as MOLLY McGee.

Mr. Driscoll was a hardy coal miner. In time his family clan numbered four daughters: Anna, Margaret, Ellen, and Marian, and nine sons: Carroll, Daniel, James, John, Joseph, Michael, Patrick, Thomas, and William.

Jim Jordan had three brothers: Martin, Leo, and Byron, whom he always affectionately called "Mickey". He also had three sisters: Katherine (Kitty), Elizabeth (Bess), and Josephine (Jo). Jim attended the rural Norwood School in District #65 and when he was twelve years old the family moved to the city of Peoria. Most of the Jordan clan quickly adapted to city life, but not "country boy Jim," who continued to work on his cousin Sam McClugage's farm until he was nearly fifteen.

Upon moving into the city, Jim was enrolled in St. Marks School where he completed the eighth grade. After graduation he went to the Spalding Institute in Peoria. One of his chums there was "Spike" Sheen, with whom he played basketball. Jim was known amongst his basketball buddies as "Monkey-Face" Jordan. Years later, "Spike" Sheen became known to the world as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. He was born the son of a farmer in El Paso, Illinois and became a young parish priest in Peoria. In 1930 Father Sheen was a pioneer radio preacher on The Catholic Hour, where his broadcasts drew as many as six thousand letters a day. Fulton Sheen went on to become one of America's most beloved clergyman.

While Jim was attending Spalding, trailing just one grade behind him at the Academy of Our Lady, directly across the street, was the



Jim Jordan (right) was a member of a musical quartet that toured the Western Vaudeville Circuit in an act called "A Night With the Poets." The troupe toured Canada and the United States, September 1917 through April, 1918.

pretty blue-eyed, brown-haired and slightly freckled, Marian Driscoll. She applied herself diligently to her daily lessons. Her musical talents included both piano and violin and she was blessed with a beautiful contralto voice. Jim, too, displayed abundant musical talents and sang in a pure tenor range. Both shared a deep love for music, and it was this mutual interest that first brought them together.

Marian and Jim met formally at a Christmas choir practice at St. John's Church in December 1915. During the social period that followed, the group sang some songs and perky Marian danced a lively jig which caught Jim's undivided attention. He urged his pal Johnny McGann to introduce him to the young lady. The introduction was arranged, and after chatting awhile, they found they liked each other very much. But bashful Jim could not work up the courage to ask if he might walk her home. Within a week, however, he did ask for a date and they went out together for the first time on New Year's Eve. Other dates soon followed.

In mid-January, Marian interrupted Jim's incessant chattering to invite him to a piano recital she was giving the following month.

On the big night he presented her with a bouquet of red roses that cost him two dollars and fifty cents, even though he was making only eight dollars a week at the time. On a little card he carefully wrote his name and the following verse:

"Roses are red,  
Violets are blue.  
Red really means--  
I love you."

The shy young couple considered this simple act a pledge of their devotion to each other. After dating a while longer, they began to give some serious thought to marriage. At the time Jim was singing tenor with a trio that entertained at various social functions around town and Marian's family did not think that Jim's hopes for a theatrical career offered much in the way of security for their daughter. Wedding plans were set aside temporarily while Jim tried his hand at various trades, including clerking in a wholesale drug house. Meanwhile he continued to sing with the trio during his spare time. Early in 1917 he organized the Templeton Quartet comprised of Ed Ellis, John Hanson, Paul Muehlenbeck, and himself. The harmonizing foursome sang at socials around Peoria.



Young and in love. A smiling pair, Jim and Marian in August, 1918 shortly before their Peoria wedding.

## First Professional Performances

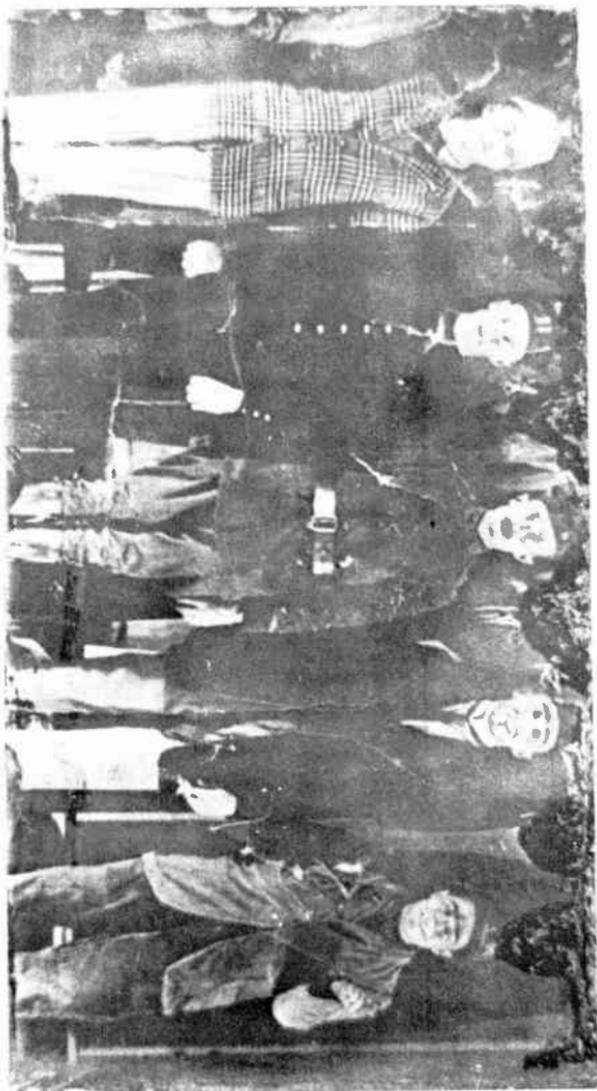
In September of 1917 Jim's vocal teacher E. Warren K. Howe secured an audition for him with a quartet in Chicago and he became top tenor for a vaudeville act billed as "A Night With the Poets" The act was written by W.B. McCallum and featured J. Walter Wilson as a studious "bachelor bookworm" whose less ambitious buddies were portrayed by H.L. McLaughlin (Henry), Manuel Rodriguez (Will) and Jim Jordan. Pretty Elizabeth Carpenter appeared in two roles, first as Robert's sweetheart, and later, as an army nurse. E.C. Clark was cast as a surgeon and Ellen Marshall played a character called "Orphan Annie." George Collins appeared as "Little Bob" and Stephen Walsh was "Young Jim", while Henry Wilton portrayed an old man. The act toured the Western Vaudeville Circuit of Canada and the United States and gave approximately 260 performances in the better theaters.

But touring was rough, consisting of many overnight train rides, poor hotel rooms and unpalatable food, all of which offended Jim's comfortable Peoria tastes. Besides, he was homesick for Marian, so he left the act in April of 1918, after concluding its thirty-nine week tour.

Jim's next steady employment came as a local mail carrier. Meanwhile, Marian had been saving her earnings from teaching piano to young would-be musicians around town. In time, the young couple managed to save up a nest egg large enough to impress both sets of parents. Permission to wed was finally granted and plans were joyously made for an August 31st wedding.

## Marriage and the Draft

The year was 1918 and the times were fraught with tensions. It had been more than sixteen months since President Wilson had declared war against Germany and the country had not been prepared for such action. It took nearly a full year before industry got into full production. As the country girded for war, Food Administrator Herbert Hoover launched a national program of voluntary food rationing by instituting Wheatless Mondays and Wednesdays, Meatless Tuesdays, and Porkless Thursdays and



Members of Jim's "Premiere Review" one of three award-winning shows for the A.E.F. in France during 1918 and 1919. Left to right: Jim Jordan, Dan Gallagher, Al Capstaff, 'Alex' and 'Tony'.

Saturdays. Housewives and kids alike not only took up knitting needles to knit woolen mittens and scarves for the trench-bound soldiers, but they also aided the war effort by saving tons of fruit pits, which were burned to make charcoal filters for gas masks. As the war grew fierce in Europe, a strong feeling of outrage developed against the enemy. Any citizen with even a drop of German blood was apt to be suspected of being a German spy. Hollywood got into the act by releasing a series of hate films such as "To Hell With the Kaiser" and "The Beast of Berlin." In a burst of anti-German fervor, Americans changed the name of German measles to "Liberty Measles." Even hamburger became known as "Liberty steak" and the ever-popular sauerkraut was referred to as "Liberty cabbage." Motorists, too, made the grand sacrifice and observed "Gasless Sundays."

It was in these tense times that Marian and Jim entered into married life. They managed to make a honeymoon trip to St. Louis to visit Jim's sister. But their happily wedded bliss was promptly interrupted when, less than a week later, on September 5th, Uncle Sam summoned Jim into the army.

The new Mrs. Jordan kept the home fires burning. She didn't allow herself time for self-pity and occupied her mind and hands by teaching piano to about fifty pupils. In addition, she played for church services and sometimes sang solos at weddings. Faithfully she prayed daily for her husband's safe return.

Meanwhile, the perky private from Peoria put in six weeks of basic training at Camp Forrest in Georgia and then was shipped off to Brest, France with the 122nd Engineers. Upon landing in France, Jim promptly contracted a severe case of dysentery, which confined him to a hospital. Private Jordan was hospital-bound until well past the signing of the Armistice. Always a showman, he had been assigned to the Entertainment Division and took full advantage of the opportunity to organize a camp show. Along with Dan Gallagher and a few other camp cronies, he put together one of the best touring shows of the American Expeditionary Forces, titled "The Premiere Review." There were thirty-five men in the show including two quartets, and Jim sang in both of them. Also in the cast was Harold McLaughlin, who later became a band leader, as well as Jimmy Kessler, who had a career in the music business. The show toured the U.S. hospitals in France for about six months after the war was over.

While stationed overseas, Jim had an unexpected reunion with his brother Byron (Mickey), which he has recalled:

*"Mickey joined the army the first week after the U.S. declared*

**METROPOLITAN**  
**MUSICAL ENTERTAINERS**

**AND BELL RINGERS**  
**ENGAGEMENT EXTRAORDINARY**



POPULAR - CLASSICAL AND STANDARD NUMBERS

**MARIMBA TRIO**  
**MUSICAL SAW**  
**BIG FIDDLE THAT TALKS**  
**FRENCH TRUMPETS**

**COMING SOON**

PIANO  
 CELLO  
 LYRIC TENOR



SOPRANO  
 FOUR IN HAND BELLS

**XYLOPHONE**  
**SAXOPHONE**  
**MUSICAL NOVELTIES**

An early poster heralding "The Metropolitan Musical Entertainers" managed by Jim who also performed with Marian and other musicians. They toured the middle western theaters from 1921 to 1923.

war. He was assigned to the artillery and was trained in Florida and shipped to France in June of 1918 as a staff sergeant. When I got to France in October, I became ill and got stuck in a hospital in St. Nazaire on the Bay of Biscay. There, I helped organize and manage 'THE PREMIERE REVIEW,' for the American Expeditionary Forces. At the time, I became concerned for my brother. I'd heard his time was up, and he'd be passing through, so I looked into the whereabouts of his outfit in St. Nazaire. Mickey was not there. It turned out he'd joined a peace mission and had signed to stay overseas and was about to go to Paris, and then on to Greece for the Peace Conference. So I gave up looking for him.

A few weeks later, I was in a 5,000 seat auditorium working the rehearsal of our show with Dan Gallagher. It was about five in the evening and I was seated in the audience area about eight rows back, while Dan was backstage with the lights. We had been working with a black comedy team, Schuler and Steel, for about thirty minutes. While sitting there enjoying the act, I heard a mess kit rattle as a soldier walked down the dirt floor of the auditorium. He was a little guy and he sat about six or seven seats to the right of me. The comedians did something that got a laugh out of us. The soldier in front of me just about killed himself laughing. That laugh sounded familiar and when the act ended, he stood up and turned around--and it was Mickey!

Now, how's that for a story?

Mickey played piano and we needed another piano player, as the show had to be split up for two different hospitals or YMCA's for the matinee performances. He accepted my invitation and managed to get his orders changed and joined us. We were in it together, doing the 'Premiere Review' until we came home together.

When we reached the United States and left base for home, the first thing we did was to buy us a half-gallon can of peaches, and we went behind a big billboard and ate the whole thing."

The long, lonely months away from Marian had finally drawn to a merciful close. A troop transport landed Jim in Newport News, Virginia, and he hurried home to Peoria.



Sweet smiling Irish coleen, during era when Marian and Jim were billed as "Marian and Jim Jordan - in a Cycle of Songs" (1924)

## First Performances Together

July 9, 1919 found Jim with his army days behind him. He and Marian bought a modest four-room house and he went to work in a machine shop. Not being meant to be a mechanic, he quit before the boss had a chance to fire him. Next, he tried his salesmanship abilities on washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and life insurance--all without much success. The work was routine and dull and Jim soon grew weary of it. He talked things through with his ever-understanding wife, who had always had a bit of show business in her blood, too. Together, they decided to give show business a try.

They combined their natural musical talents with a lot of hard work and determination and soon began making appearances at local gatherings. But they were getting nowhere, fast, until one night when Ralph Miller, an advance man for a traveling theatrical company, heard them perform and offered some badly needed words of encouragement, which convinced them that they had a future in the entertainment world. With renewed determination, the pair decided to give it their all. The venture they had in mind called for a considerable investment in wardrobe, scenery, and traveling expenses. To raise the necessary funds, they began by selling their old car for \$125. Next, they mortgaged their home, but still didn't have enough cash to get started. There was no turning back, so Jim went to his beloved Aunt Kate Doubet, to borrow the balance. In future years, Aunt Kate followed their career closely and remained their most devoted fan and severest critic.

With the necessary funds in hand at last, Jim hastened to hire some professional musicians with whom he and Marian formed a unique concert troupe billed as THE METROPOLITAN MUSICAL ENTERTAINERS. They had some large posters printed up proudly proclaiming the group as:

"AN ENGAGEMENT EXTRAORDINARY . . .  
Presenting--Pop - Classical and Standard Numbers - Featuring  
Swiss Hand Bell Ringers - Marimba Trio - Musical Saw - French  
Trumpets - Xylophone - Saxophone - Cello - AND 'A Big Fiddle  
That Talks!'"

Marian was featured on the piano while Jim drew special billing as "Lyric Tenor." The troupe traveled by train, performing in a new location every day. Matinees were presented in high school auditoriums and evening concerts were staged in halls and theatres of varying sizes. Sometimes, to gain an extra audience, Jim would



Handsome portrait of Jim while on tour of the vaudeville circuit in the Chicago area in 1924.

give lectures on the various instruments used.

The concert act was a huge success. In its peak year it earned \$25,000, quite a tidy sum for the times. The Jordans found great joy in their work, and to add to their happiness, a daughter, Kathryn, was born on June 18, 1920. They continued to tour with the act until a few months before the birth of their son, Jim, Jr., on August 3, 1923. After which, Marian and the children returned to Peoria while Jim continued alone in vaudeville for a time.

Back home, Grandpa Jordan, who had been a cow-puncher hunting the western plains with Buffalo Bill (or so, he claimed) delighted in recalling his early adventures for a captive audience-his grandchildren. At times, Marian would leave the children with relatives and join Jim for some vaudeville bookings. Billed as MARIAN AND JIM JORDAN - HARMONY TEAM, she tickled the ivories and both sang. The act was strictly musical and did not include any comedy patter as many other musical acts of the time. Their repertoire included such old favorites as: "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," "You Tell Me Your Dream," "When You're Smiling," "Knee-Deep in Daisies," and comedy numbers like: "She Knows Her Onions" and "Bridget O'Flynn." Their act usually concluded with some sweet harmony on "Side By Side." Finances were not always good, and while playing an engagement at Lincoln, Illinois, about 50 miles from home, they went broke and had to wire home for car-fare.

The make-up and costumes were packed away, temporarily, and undaunted, Jim went to work as a clerk in a dry goods store, and later in the toy section of a department store. The talented pair sometimes were able to earn a few extra dollars with local singing engagements. A booking at Kewanee in 1925 brought them the hefty sum of fifty dollars. This sudden windfall sounded the call of show business once again in Jim's ears. He set out for Chicago to work in a musical act along with song-writer Egbert Van Alstyne and baritone, Clem Dancy. The Chicago-born composer was one of the greatest song writers of the time and had had more than five hundred of his songs published. Van Alstyne had written for such stage headliners as Al Jolson and George M. Cohan. Included among his many hit songs were such bits of musical Americana as: "Memories," "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," "Pony Boy," "What's the Matter With Father?," "Won't You Come Over to My House?," "Pretty Baby," and "Drifting and Dreaming."

It was while he was working with Van Alstyne in 1923 that Jim made his first radio broadcast. The inauspicious event took place following an evening performance at the State Theater in



Marian 'tickles the ivories' of the piano in station WENR studio while Jim gets ready to burst out in song.

Minneapolis. Jim was taken to a small broadcasting studio nearby, where he sang a few songs over the air. However, it would be another year before the Jordans were to appear on the air together for the first time.

## Chicago Radio Audition

During the time when Jim was traveling alone in vaudeville, Marian tried to visit him in Chicago as often as she possibly could. On one such visit, an important event took place in Jim's brother Byron's home in the Rogers Park section. The group was gathered in the living room to listen to a fancy new gadget that was becoming quite popular--a piece of furniture that talked--the RADIO! Through the constant din of crackling static, the faint sounds of a singing group could be heard. Jim remarked that he and Marian could sing a whole lot better than what they were listening to. Byron dared him to try to get a job at the radio station. Jim took on the ten dollar bet, Marian put on her best hat, and they hurried off to see the station manager about an audition. The anxious pair tried out with a soulful rendition of "Can't You Hear Me Callin', Caroline?." They impressed the manager at Station WIBO well enough to be hired for the next six months, at ten dollars a week.

Jim Jordan has recalled:

*"I think it was 1925 when we first went on the air. Our first radio show was called THE JORDANS, MARIAN AND JIM over WIBO. That's when a performer learned how because you knew nobody was listening to it anyway, so you caught on how to do it. On that show we didn't speak a word, it was all songs and piano. We didn't talk on the radio until 1927. So between 1925 and 1927 we worked on an average of three radio stations a night.*

*The first commercial thing we did was THE O'HENRY TWINS program. It was a Friday night feature with other vocalists as well. The O'Henry Candy Company paid us \$35 a week and we couldn't live on it, so we had to go back into vaudeville to catch up."*

Marian and Jim introduced several new songs over the air. Their photographs graced the covers of several pieces of sheet music including: "Oh, Doctor!" written by Louis Panico and Phil Hopkins, and "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane," with lyrics and music by Will S. Hays. The ambitious pair also began to make the



WE'VE TEAMED AS "JOE AND NORAH" -  
- AS "LUKE AND MIRANDY", TOO  
AND AS "MARIAN AND JIM" WE'RE TEAMING  
WITH WISHES BEST FOR YOU!

This delightful Christmas card was sent to friends and relatives of the Jordans in 1930, reminding them of the many different characters they played during their days at station WENR (Chicago).

rounds of other radio stations seeking a show of their own.

However, Jim's main interest remained in playing vaudeville engagements, for that's where he felt the money could be made.

Many of their early broadcasts were made without benefit of any payment. But they continued to appear on radio in order to announce the location of their forthcoming stage appearances over the air. But the names of Jim and Marian Jordan remained relatively unknown outside of the Chicago area. The 'big break' was yet to arrive.

## The WENR Contract

Their vaudeville act was sometimes billed as MARIAN AND JIM - IN A CYCLE OF SONGS. While working an engagement at the Palace Theater in Chicago, they met another husband and wife comedy team, Tim and Irene Ryan. During a backstage chat the Ryans tried to persuade them to add some comedy to their act and to move to New York City, where it was believed they would be able to obtain steady work on the Marcus Lowe Vaudeville circuit in "the big time." Jim was skeptical, insisting that they were musicians, not comedians.

Nothing much was happening locally and they had about decided to follow the Ryans' advice when they met an old friend from Peoria, Howard Newmiller, a radio executive, who told them about an opening at station WENR in Chicago. The next day they auditioned--and landed the job. They were given a contract calling for three days of broadcasting. The remainder of the week was free for them to make stage appearances, with the additional bonus of being able to announce their stage appearances on the program. Jim felt it was an ideal situation.

The contract at WENR also marked a turning point in their career. There were some hard times yet ahead of them, but never again would they be without a contract for steady work.

Beginning Monday, October 3, 1927, the Jordans were heard on WENR's THE AIR SCOUTS, a quarter-hour children's program sponsored by the People's Gas, Light and Coke Company, for which they were paid \$60 weekly. On the 5 p.m. program, they sang and were sometimes assisted by some youngsters in story-telling and other bits of make-believe. It was on this program that Marian first experimented with her famous "Teeny" voice characterization. She got the idea from the chattering of her own young daughter, Kathryn. It was also on this same program that

## SMACK-OUTS CAST

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Newspaper clipping pertaining to the premiere of the Jordans new program "Smackout" (March 3, 1931) WMAQ Chicago.

Jim began to experiment with the character that would eventually become "Fibber McGee". As an old man, he told tall tales to the tiny tots listening in.

Another early radio program on which the Jordans were heard was called GRAB BAG. One of the features of the variety format show was the dramatizing of cartoons which had been taken from the humor magazines of the day. Marian often impersonated as many as a dozen different voices on a single broadcast.

By 1928 Marian and Jim had begun to portray a couple of rural characters they called LUKE AND MIRANDY, on a show of the same name. On this show Jim created the character "Luke Gray," a proverbial teller of tall tales, another step in the metamorphosis of FIBBER MCGEE. As "Mirandy," Luke's long-suffering spouse, Marian used a voice quite similar to the one she used later for "Mrs. Wearybottom." The Jordans continually added to their list of vocal characterizations. Marian, a very versatile actress, became the forerunner of the soap opera mother figure of radio serials with her leading role on THE SMITH FAMILY series that debuted on June 9, 1929. This continuing drama was written by Harry Lawrence and was sponsored by the National Tea Company and Quality Grocers of the Middlewest.

The program told the continuing story of a supposedly typical middle-class American family. Marian was heard as Nora Smith, while P.G. "Bud" Morris played her husband, Ed, a building contractor. Thora Martens played their daughter, Irene, and Daisy Dugan portrayed daughter, Betty. Jim Jordan was heard as Irene's prize-fighter boyfriend, Joe Fitzgerald. The pair were married as the story progressed placing Marian in the most unusual position of playing her real-life husband's on-the-air mother-in-law. Actor Joe Smith was heard as Betty's piano teacher, Henry Marshall. Her violin-playing sweetheart, Morris Rosenberg was played by Joe Warner. Irma Glen supplied the organ music and Edwin Delbridge was the show's announcer.

When the fictional Smith family became affluent, they bought a fancy horse hair sofa for their living room. There was a certain spring in the sofa that always made a god-awful sound every time someone sat down. The familiar sound always got a laugh and became a trademark of the program. At one point in the continuing story line, Nora Smith ran in a political race against her husband. She represented the Progressive Party while Mr. Smith ran on an Independent ticket. She won.

The program aired twice weekly for two-and-a-half years, continuing for 156 broadcasts, through April 3, 1932. Researchers of early radio serials are now in agreement that Marian and Jim



A fine character study of Jim made up as "Luke Gray" the fore-runner of FIBBER McGEE.

pioneered in the serialization of everyday human interest stories, making the SMITH FAMILY program a springboard for the "soap operas" which followed. The program brought the Jordans many new listeners and fans. When WENR, an NBC affiliate, increased its broadcast schedule to include late-night programming, the Jordans were subsequently heard more frequently and their salary was upped to \$60 per week.

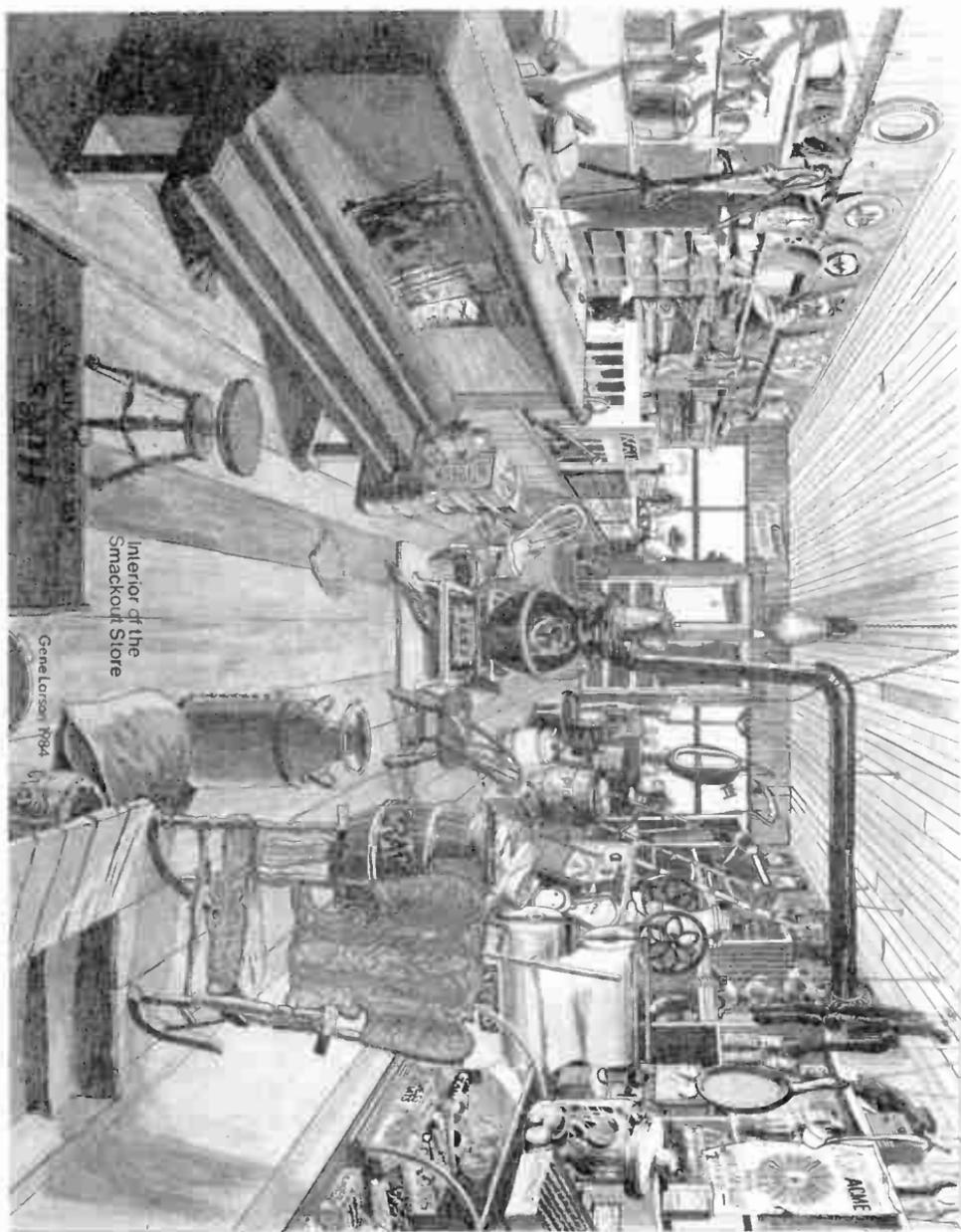
## "Smackout"

While they were working at station WENR, the Jordans became acquainted with E.W. Rusk, who had his own program on which he was known as FARMER RUSK. Marian and Jim became regulars on his show and sometimes presented some of their "Luke and Mirandy" sketches. On April 27, 1931 the FARMER RUSK-TOP O' THE MORNING program moved to station WMAQ. Along with Rusk, the show featured Marian and Jim with Joe Gallichio and his orchestra and balladeer, Doc Hopkins. Aryl Aldred was the program's announcer.

For a long time, friends in the broadcasting business had tried to persuade the Jordans to include some comedy routines in their musical programs. They had given the suggestion some serious thought, but had not been able to come up with any workable ideas, until one day when Jim remembered some stories that Rusk had told him.

*JIM JORDAN: "While we were working with Farmer Rusk he told us about his days at the University of Missouri. There was this old man that had a store at a crossroads that was so filled with junk that he could hardly walk through it. No matter what a customer asked for, he might be looking right at it, but he'd say: 'Sorry, I'm smackout--but I'll have some in for you tomorrow.' The students from the University used to love to hang out there because the old man amused them. He was a god-awful liar. They got a great big banner that read: 'SMACKOUT' and hung it in front of the store. And from then on, the store became known as 'SMACKOUT.' It was about that time that we first met Don Quinn. . . ."*

Don Quinn was a commercial cartoonist and gag-writer from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Temporarily unemployed, Quinn had begun to spend much of his free time hanging around Chicago radio stations in hope of landing some script writing work. One day at WENR he noticed a certain preoccupied gent with a harassed



Interior of the  
Smackout Store

Gene Larson 1984

The interior of the 'Smackout Store' located at the 'Crossroads of the Air', as conceived by artist Gene Larson. The store is complete to the most minute detail.

look on his face, hurrying through the corridor. That harassed looking gent turned out to be none other than Jim Jordan, frantically trying to come up with some material on the spur of the moment. Quinn hurriedly introduced himself and timidly suggested that he could write some special comedy material for the occasion. A lifelong friendship was born on the spot.

Quinn's vivid imagination proved to be just the spark that Marian and Jim had needed to ignite the flame of comedy genius. Together, the trio worked out a comedy format for a show they decided to call: MARIAN AND JIM IN SMACKOUT--THE CROSSROADS OF THE AIR.

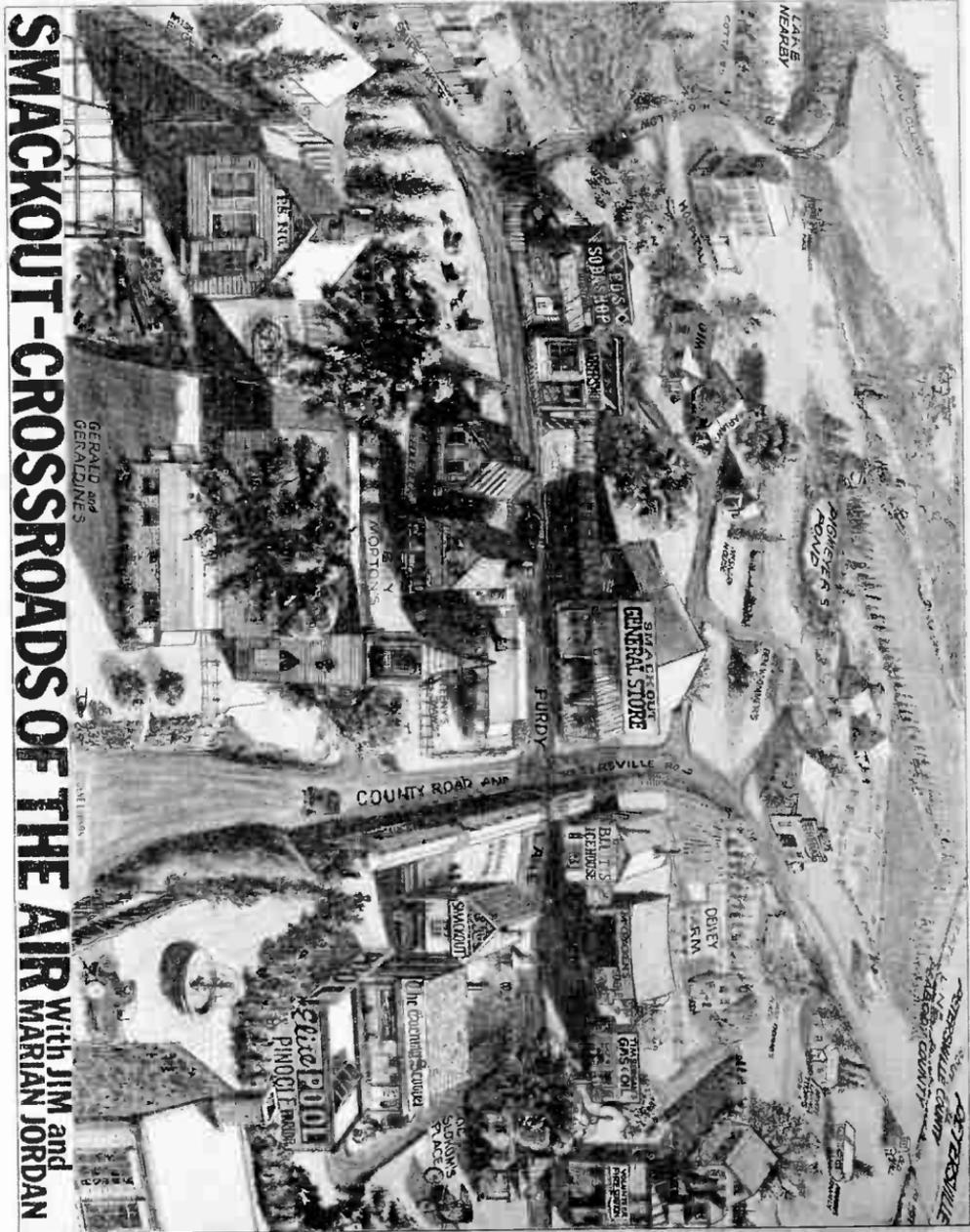
SMACKOUT premiered on Monday, March 2, 1931, on station WMAQ. The program was heard for a quarter of an hour every Monday through Saturday, except when pre-empted, which was often the case. On November 1, 1931 WMAQ was acquired by the NBC network.

The show opened with Marian and Jim singing:

"Hang on tight, and look out!  
We're on our way to SMACKOUT.  
The store down on--  
The Crossroads of the Air!"

The staff orchestras of either Joe Gallichio, Harry Kogen or Walter Blaufis played the opening theme music, but all other music on the show was provided by Marian and Jim, usually two or three numbers per show.

The character of Luke Gray was created for SMACKOUT. He was the bucolic proprietor of the smackout store and had living quarters in the rear. Luke Abinadab Gray was born and raised in Hawg Hollow, located in the valley near Smackout Corners. Abinadab is a Biblical name and one wonders why Quinn would have used it for a comedy character. Luke was a short man with spectacles, gray hair and a goatee. He always wore a wide-brimmed hat with a G.A.R. badge on it. Despite the endless tall tales he liked to tell, the old boy had never been beyond Chicago in his life. He was an enthusiastic member of the Men's Lodge known as R.S.V.P. (Rat Shooters Vigilante Patrol). His favorite pastimes were whittling and pitching horseshoes, which he would much rather do than tend store. Frequently, Luke would deny that the store was open, and almost always told customers that he was "smackout" of whatever it was they were asking for, be it candlesticks, cookie-cutters or collar buttons. However, he was always well-stocked with a goodly supply of tall tales, such as the



Artist Gene Larson conceived this wonderful overhead view of the fictional community in which Luke Gray's 'Smackout Store' was located. Note the many marvelous details and locations of familiar character's homes.

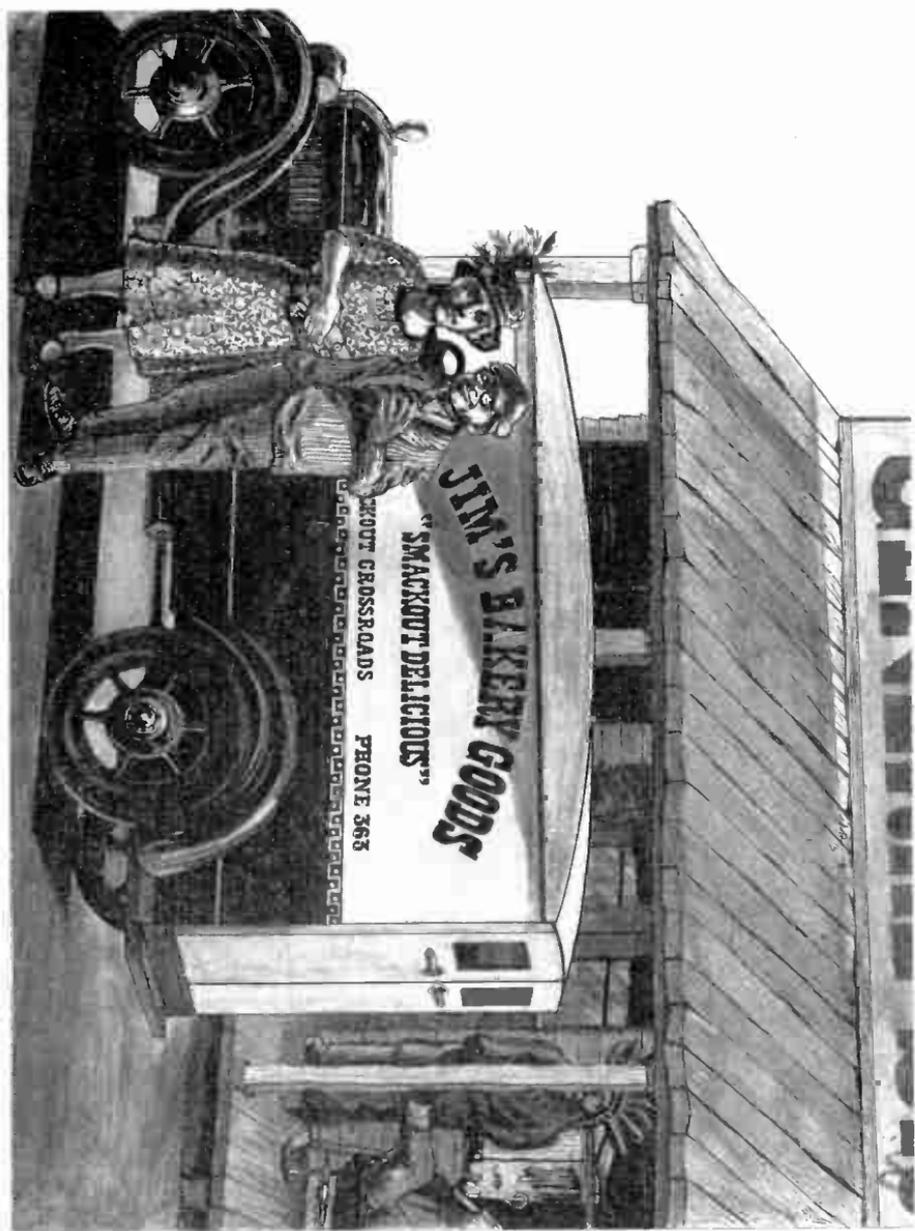
one about the time he taught some woodpeckers how to tap out messages in Morse Code, and another one about the time he grew square tomatoes to use in bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwiches.

Sometimes Luke wrote poems and limericks which he recited for the customers. When he was alone in the store, he usually sang snatches of "Go Tell Aunt Rhodie, the Old Grey Goose is Dead." He liked to talk about some of his old girl friends like Mirandy and Bedelia Witherby. He also spoke of his nephew Albert, his Uncle Featherwell, and cousin Alexander "Zan" Gray. He also liked to reminisce about his old World War I buddies and other cronies like Andy Hebstein, Cy Jemmerton, Eb Doolittle, Egmer Derpy, Ebenezer Tarnsocket, Lump Murphy, Nally Tolsky, Clem Wurpet, Sam Tappit, Johnny Dilman and Joe Tillman.

Luke's colorful speech was well-peppered with such homespun expressions as: "By Timothy . . . By snackers . . . By the fifteen fliverrin' fiddlers . . . How in the tunket? . . . Cross my heart and spit on the sidewalk . . . Bothered the whey out of me . . . I'll be plowed under . . . Well, wouldn't that jest paint ye purple, cut ye in two, and plow ye under. . . ." He also uttered such phrases of exasperation as: "Dad-fiddled . . . Dag-gum it! . . . Dat rat it!" . . . and "Ah, pshaw!". The latter two were carried over with the Fibber McGee character.

The Smackout Store conjured up vivid images of a crowded country store with its tinkling bell on the front door, cluttered aisles heaped with unsorted merchandise, big Franklin stove, and glass showcase full of lollypops, which was mainly for the convenience of Luke's little friend, Teeny, who was often allowed to help herself to some sweets and even take some for her pal Willie Toops. There was also a piano that Marian played every day when she stopped by the store. There was also a post office window where Luke received letters from listeners making song requests. Quite a few of the letters asked for Teeny to sing some of her specialties such as "Is I Gotta Go to School, Ma?", "I Got the Mumps," "Rockin' Horse Parade," "Pals of the Little Red School," and when in season, "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town."

The building had a porch with chairs for sittin' and whittlin'. Beside the store was a very conspicuous horse shoe pitch setup, and a lean-to addition for the storage of fruits and vegetables. Neighboring buildings included Eb Smalley's Barbershop, Ed's Soda Fountain, the Railroad Station and Smackout Corners Volunteer Fire Station, the E-Lite Pool and Pinochle Parlor, as well as the local newspaper office, The Evening Scooper. Up the road a piece, and across the state line in Virginia, was the larger town of Petersville and places such as Hawg Hollow. Other picturesque



Marian and Jim beside Jim's delivery wagon.

places scattered throughout Bacondrind Township were: Bear Grease Gap, Clam City, Burkitt's Corners, Crouches Corners, Kinsmigger's Corners, Gibbs Grove, Henneman's Hill, Williamsions Cliff, Wilson's Ridge and Pelican Lake, as well as the towns of Beldon, Maplehurst and Smitherton.

Jim Jordan was perfect as Luke Gray and also produced and directed the show. In addition, he was heard as "Jim," a bakery deliveryman who stopped by the store every day. His girlfriend Marian played the piano for him, and they both sang. Announcers at various times were: Bob White, Jack Negley, Alfred Saxe, and Everett G. Mitchell.

Marian's very versatile voice gave great variety to the full array of characters she portrayed on the program: TEENY, a perplexing, but positively endearing little tyke who liked to talk about her doll, Jelinda, and her female cat that she called "Percy." She even supplied the vocal sound effects for same. Originally Teeny had lived across the street from the store with her aunt, but she was adopted by Luke in November of 1933 . . . MRS. (S.P. Bedelia) THOMAS who was a frequent customer. She was a widow who had been left "well-fixed" and had aspirations of becoming a singer, although she was totally lacking in musical talent. Mrs. Thomas studied voice with Professor Enrico Salva-Ravioli. She had an undeniable crush on Luke, and her favorite expression was "My stars!!!" . . . GERALDINE, was a large heavysset customer. Big, gabby, gurgling, and giddy. She frequently spoke of her husband, Gerald . . . MARIE (Batceste deMolay deBounee San Youbair Bertrand) was a French government agent seeking historic French treasures in Smackout Corners for a Paris museum. The role gave Marian ample opportunity to display her great flair for dialects. . . . MRS. (J. HIGH-HAT) UPSON, was a haughty highbrow who owned a mansion on the hill obviously a fore-runner of the Mrs. Uppington character used later on the McGee show). Mrs. Upson usually clashed with Luke. She had a little dog named Mitzi . . . THE WIDOW (Cornelia) WHEEDLEDECK, was meddlesome and nosey. She frequently asked the prices of things but seldom bought anything. Originally the character had been called "Widow Widdledeck" . . . Marian was also heard as LAVINIA TOOPS (Mort's wife), and BERTHA BOOP, a glamorous Hollywood star who had grown weary of the glitter and sham of Hollywood and came to Smackout Corners to visit Mrs. Upson. Marian also portrayed dozens of female customers, many with different accents and dialects.

Among Jim's many characterizations were: AUGIE PIGMEYER, a heavy-accented German immigrant farmer who



Marian and Jim broadcast before a studio audience at WMAQ Studios (Chicago 1934).

owned the area's most popular swimming and fishing pond . . . PERKY McSNARK more-or-less the town idiot who brought the daily sack of mail up from the railroad station. Perky had hidden artistic talent which was later discovered . . . SQUIRE LOVEJOY, was a wealthy old chisler from the neighboring town of Petersville . . . SPEED TURNER, was an intelligent traveling salesman who came to the store every Friday, and them some . . . MAJOR (George Carleton Selwyn) STAFFORD, an old windbag and complete fraud. He boarded at the widow Wheedledeck's and became the fiancee of Mrs. Thomas.

In reality (make-believe reality, that is) the Major was an escaped convict after the widow's inheritance . . . Jim was also heard as MORT TOOPS, Luke's argumentative horseshow competitor.

Jim's vocal trickery also ran the gamut of assorted Irish policemen, Italian professors, gangsters and goofy-voiced odd-ball characters. He even supplied the vocal effects for a dancing bear named Garibaldi. Between them, Marian and Jim supplied more than 150 different character voices during the course of the SMACKOUT series.

Don Quinn's abundant wit and fertile imagination gave birth to an endless parade of other colorful characters. Some were never heard to speak on the show, and were merely referred to, but they became familiar to listeners nevertheless. Such colorful creations as "Carnivorous (Carny) Morton," a black hog farmer (possibly a forerunner of the "Silly Watson" character later to appear on the McGee program), and "Jorp Cankle," champion horseshoe pitcher from Hawg Hollow, as well as "Snipe McFee," who could sharpen a pencil with a bullet--at 8,000 feet!

The program originated in Chicago except for the period of Monday, April 5th through Friday, May 3, 1935, while the Jordans were in New York City to launch the Fibber McGee program. A dozen SMACKOUT programs were broadcast from NBC's studios in New York. The program was sustained by the network without benefit of a sponsor for its entire air run. The Jordans were paid \$200 weekly for their services. Because Marian also played the piano on the program and was a member of the musician's union, she received the larger portion of the salary--\$140. Jim paid Don Quinn \$40 weekly for his writing services, which left him with the remaining sum of \$20 for a full week's work.

On occasion, the SMACKOUT program had been pre-empted and was often off the air entirely for brief intervals while the Jordans vacationed or were working out of town. Beginning May 27, 1933, the show was suddenly dropped by the network who felt that there wasn't a sufficient number of listeners to warrant keeping



Publicity photo used for advertising theater engagements in Chicago region while the Jordans were performing on WENR and other Chicago radio stations.

it on the air. Hundreds of letters of protest poured into the station and the show was resumed on Monday, September 25th that same year and continued for a total of 948 broadcasts. It left the air on August 3, 1935--nearly four months after the start of the Fibber McGee program.

It is interesting to note that another of radio's best-loved programs also dealt with the theme of a rural store run by a pair of rustic characters--LUM AND ABNER. That program's creators, Chester Lauck and Norris Goff were both natives of little towns in Arkansas where Goff's father ran a general store. Boyhood friends, the pair started out by entertaining friends with some comedy dialect routines. On April 26, 1931, they made their radio debut as LUM AND ABNER, the bucolic proprietors of the friendly "Jot-Em-Down" store in the fictional town of Pine Ridge. The program gained rapid popularity and remained a top favorite for twenty-five years. In April of 1936 in celebration of the show's fifth year on the air, the village of Waters, Arkansas went through an act of Congress and got its name changed officially to "Pine Ridge." In 1970, Ralph and Dorothy McClure became the proprietors of an old country store in Pine Ridge and turned it into a replica of the Jot-Em-Down store. The building next to it had been built in 1904 and was used as both a general store and storage barn for hay. It has since been converted into a Lum and Abner Museum.

Another interesting fact--SMACKOUT pre-dated LUM AND ABNER by exactly eight weeks. Coincidentally, both programs had a somewhat similar story line, and both were carried on the NBC network. Other parallels can also be drawn: In July of 1931, the Lum and Abner program moved to Chicago as a summer replacement for the Gene and Glenn musical program. The Jordans were acquainted with both Lauck and Goff and it is conceivable that "Lum and Abner" and "Luke Gray" might have borrowed a few character traits from each other--or, at least, had some influence on each other. Jim Jordan has recalled that Marian, as Teeny, once made some appearances on the air with Lum and Abner. It would seem safe to assume that those appearances took place sometime late in 1931 when both programs were airing from NBC in Chicago. Later, both programs moved to Hollywood.

During the air run of SMACKOUT, Don Quinn built up a cast of characters and an ideal format for displaying the unique talents of the Jordans. The four-and-one-half year struggle as a sustaining show, with little or no budget, paved the way for the greater success which was to follow.



Professor Kaltenmeyer (Bruce Kamman) applies the golden rule to Mickey Donovan's (Jim Jordan) backside, as Izzy Finklestein (Johnny Wolfe), Gertie Glump (Marian Jordan), and Percy Van Schuyler (Merrill Fugit) look on. All were part of the antics at "Kaltenmeyer's Kindergarten - The Nonsense School of the Air" (1936).

## Other Early Broadcasts

Beginning Monday, August 10, 1931, Marian and Jim substituted for a two-week period for the vacationing THREE DOCTORS comedy program that featured Ransom Sherman, Joe Rudolph, and Russell Pratt. The Jordans presented Monday through Saturday programs of music from the 10th through the 22nd of August, except on Sundays, when the Chicago Cubs baseball game was broadcast during the time period.

In 1932, in a rare departure from the usual team performances, WMAQ scheduled Jim solo in a series titled MR. TWISTER, MIND TRICKSTER. It was one of radio's earliest studio audience participation shows and Jim served as master of ceremonies. The Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night show was sponsored by Borden's Ice Cream. The show premiered on Friday, June 24, 1932 at 7:00 p.m. In December, the Monday night broadcast was dropped. The program ran through November 10, 1933 for a total of 103 broadcasts.

Meanwhile the Jordans continued to work together on their SMACKOUT program. Their next joint venture was KALTENMEYER'S KINDERGARTEN, "The Nonsense School of the Air." Originally conceived by Bruce Kamman in 1930 as a one-time program, it drew very favorable response from listeners and in October of 1932 it was developed into a popular series. The four original members of the cast were Kamman, Johnny Wolf and the Jordans. The program originated in the studios of WMAQ before a live audience. In 1933 it was picked up by the NBC Red Network and aired nation-wide. The show was sustained by the network until January 5, 1935 when Quaker Oats began paying the bills.

Professor Kaltenmeyer, the German schoolmaster, was portrayed by Bruce Kamman who was also heard in the role of the partially deaf school trustee, Elmer Spivins. Johnny Wolf was heard as Isadore (Izzy) Finlestein, while Marian played the giggly and glib Gertie Glump and doubled in the role of Mrs. Van Schuyler. Jim was heard as the rougish and dense Mickey Donovan, as well as Cy Wintergreen. Other kindergarten pupils were portrayed by Merrill Fugit as the prissy Percy Van Schuyler and Thor Erickson as a young Swede, Yonny Yohnson. Bruce Kamman also played the role of Mickey Donovan's father while Isabel Randolph was heard as Mrs. Donovan. Actor Wolf was sometimes called upon to impersonate Izzy's mother. Another character, Tony, was written



A serious looking eleven year old Marian Driscoll all dressed up for a dance recital in Peoria (1909).

out of the show when the actor who portrayed him, Don Mangano, was killed in an auto accident. Clinton Stanley was the program's director, Harry Lawrence assisted with the writing, while music was provided by Harry Kogen's orchestra.

The entire cast joined in to sing the show's amusing theme, whose music sounded so very much like the "Our Gang Comedies" movie music:

"KALTENMEYER'S startin',  
Let's all go to school.  
In his Kindergarten,  
Where everyone's a fool.  
Boy, do we pull boners!  
Mischief, we all raise,  
Lots of it, and you'll admit,  
Were in those good old days."

Marian and Jim continued with the show until the autumn of 1936 when they departed to concentrate on promotions for their own new FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY program.

KALTENMEYER'S KINDERGARTEN was still a popular air favorite in 1940, but when anti-Nazi German sentiments began to spread across the land, the program's name was changed to KINDERGARTEN KAPERS and the ultra German Professor Kaltenmeyer had his name changed to "Ulysses S. Applegate" (whose initials plainly spelled out U.S.A.).

Other programs on which the Jordans appeared during this time period were THE SATURDAY NIGHT JAMBOREE and NBC's NATIONAL FARM AND HOME HOUR, which Jim jokingly referred to as "The Harm and Foam Hour." They also guested on Don McNeill's popular morning show, THE BREAKFAST CLUB, where they were featured in sketches portraying characters known as "Toots" (Marian) and "Chickie" (Jim).

JIM JORDAN: *"Way back before FIBBER McGEE, NBC asked us to go on Don McNeill's BREAKFAST CLUB show. So we cooked up this little skit about two old bucolic characters called Toots and Chickie.' Every morning we stood on a little platform right in the middle of the orchestra to do our skit. There was no studio audience around at 7:00 o'clock in the morning in those days. And so the band laughed at our jokes as if they were our audience . . . Every morning we'd begin the skit with Marian saying: 'Good morning, Chickie,' and I'd reply: 'Hi, Toots!'. Then we'd go on with our skit. Well, this particular morning at 7:00 o'clock, out we came. We were standing there in the middle*



The home where Marian lived as a girl with her three sisters and nine brothers, and their very busy mother. Father Driscoll was a coal miner, by trade.

*of the orchestra and Marian said 'Good morning, Chickie,' and I replied 'Hi ya, Tits!' And you know, we went on for about three-quarters of the page of the script before we got to looking around. There were the guys from the band laying all over the floor--laughing. Don McNeill was out of the studio having a cup of coffee and he didn't hear it. . . . That was one of my most embarrassing moments. . . ."*

THE BREAKFAST CLUB broadcasts were quite informal, spontaneous and completely unrehearsed. Walter Blaufuss, the composer of "My Isle of Golden Dreams," was the leader of the Breakfast Club Orchestra. Among the musicians in his band during Marian and Jim's appearances on the show in 1934, were Wee Willie Krenz on piano and trumpeter Eddie Ballantine, who later took over the leadership of the band. The program's musical theme in those days was entitled "Too Much Mustard." Among the show's famous alumni were such notable talents as Bill Thompson who tested his "Wallace Wimple" character on the show in 1934. Also heard during this period were singers Gale Page and Clark Dennis. All three were later affiliated with the Fibber McGee program.

On June 23, 1947, the Breakfast Club celebrated "Old Grads Day", and many former cast members either appeared on the show or sent recorded messages to be aired. The Jordans were unable to attend but sent transcribed greetings and included in their congratulatory message was this tickler: "It's all very well for Don McNeill to celebrate fifteen years on THE BREAKFAST CLUB, but what about the next thirteen weeks? Is he set?" This was their good-natured way of teasing McNeill about the renewal of his contract.

## Guest Appearances

Chicago was home base for many of radio's top personalities in the early 1930's. Beginning in December of 1931 the Chicago Daily News sponsored an annual Radio Revue featuring many of the Chicago radio stars in person. The Revues were held at the University of Chicago Stadium to help raise money for various charities in the area.

On Monday, December 4, 1933, the Third Annual Revue was staged before an overflowing crowd and netted more than \$15,000 for charity. The line-up of performers included all of the top names in Chicago broadcasting. Phil Baker, Irene Rich and Don McNeill



Marian and Jim, September, 1935.

shared the emcee duties. Representing the CBS network were such diverse entertainers as soap opera stars Myrt and Marge (Myrtle Vail and Donna Damerel) and actor DeWolf Hopper. Station WGN was represented by Irene Wicker, "The Singing Lady" and the musical trio, Tom, Dick and Harry (Bud Vandover, Marlin Hurt and Gordon Vandover) and the funny air gossips, Clara, Lu, and Em (Louise Starkey, Isabel Carothers and Helen King). WLS sent its National Barn Dance troupe, including a young boy soprano named George Goebel (George Gobel). Station KYW was represented by bandleader Harry Sosnick. Other bands on hand were those of Phil Harris and Ted Weems of NBC, Vincent Lopez of CBS, as well as Wayne King, Jan Garber, Hal Kemp, and Clyde McCoy, all of whom were heard over WGN. Among the stars representing NBC were Amos 'n Andy (Freemond Gosden and Charles Correll), Wendall Hall (The Red-Headed Music-maker), and Marian and Jim Jordan.

Among the many friends Marian and Jim made while working at station WMAQ, was singer Pat Peterson who headed the quartet, the Maple City Four. The group was made up of Peterson, Art James, Fritz Meissner, and Al Rice. When the Chicago World's Fair opened for business in 1934, the Jordans, during some of their rare "free time," joined the Maple City Four in setting up a peanut stand on the fairgrounds. For one thin dime they offered their customers, not only a generous sized bag of hot roasted peanuts, but also threw in a "free show" as well. As usual, Marian and Jim were much too generous with both their product and their talents, and the little business venture ended in a loss.

## "Fibber McGee and Molly"

Many of the radio performers who were based in Chicago began to get restless, and some set out for greener pastures. Among those to leave Chicago was Ransom Sherman, who moved on to KMOX in St. Louis. In time, the Jordans also began to entertain thoughts of moving on to another area.

*JIM JORDAN: "During the World Series of 1934 we took a little trip and went to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Louisville. The big station in those days was at Cincinnati and had the first 50,000 watt air power. That's where we wanted to go, but they weren't interested in us. However, Pittsburgh was, and so was Louisville. We were inclined to go to Pittsburgh. We went and talked to NBC about it, but they wanted us to hang on a little longer in Chicago."*



During the first two and one-half years on the air as 'Fibber and Molly', the Jordans worked in full costume and make-up. A carry-over from their many stage appearances.

*We'd been hanging on there at WMAQ for four years (1931-1935) doing SMACKOUT as a sustaining program, but they wouldn't allow us to announce our theater dates over the air. . . We had our move from Chicago all staked out when the Johnson Wax people offered us a twenty-six week contract in late 1934. . . . During the time we were doing SMACKOUT, there was a woman, Henrietta Johnson Louis, who listened in every day. She was the daughter of H. F. Johnson, head of the Johnson Wax Company and the wife of Jack Louis of the Needham, Louis and Brorby Advertising Agency. She was a fan and she got her husband to listen, too. She'd listen in at home, and when he was traveling, he'd listen in on his car radio."*

The Johnson Wax Company had been sponsoring the Tony Wons radio program, which was about to go off the air. Jack Louis knew that the company would be looking for another radio program to sponsor. And so he set about interesting his clients in sponsoring a new program featuring the talents of the stars of SMACKOUT--Marian and Jim Jordan.

It was a "heavenly day" when Marian and Jim signed a contract with the Johnson Wax Company to have a network radio show of their own. The wax company assigned the new account to the Needham, Louis and Brorby Advertising Agency, placing Jack Louis in charge. The agency, in turn, contracted Don Quinn to write the show, but maintained full control over the program's story line as well as the content of the commercials. The sponsors weren't exactly sure that they wanted to keep the Luke Gray character that Jim had auditioned for them, nor were they sure they wanted to continue the SMACKOUT general store format.

After several conferences, it was decided to keep the Luke Gray type character, but to change the show's premise, as well as the characters' names. One thing had been unanimously decided--the main characters would be a middle-aged married couple, touring the country in their car. Such a format would permit plenty of opportunity to tie in the sponsor's line of automobile polishing products. The ad men began to toy around with various names for the program and had more or less decided upon calling the new show: FREE AIR.

However, it was brought to their attention that Jim Jordan had been presented with a recent award for "Best Tall-Tale of the Year" by the Burlington Liars Club of Wisconsin. The award was made in recognition of the tall tales he had told as "Luke Gray" on the SMACKOUT program.

The prize-winning yarn went something like this:

*"Two years ago the weather was so cold it drove a rat into our*



An early portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Fibber McGee of 79 Wistful Vista. (1935).

house for shelter. Do whatever I would, I could not catch it, not even with a cleverly baited trap. Finally I hit upon an idea. 'The cold moved you in,' sez I to myself, 'and the cold will catch you!' I brought in our largest thermometer and put a piece of cheese beneath it. The next morning I had Mr. Rat! The mercury had fallen so low during the night, that it had pinned Mr. Rat to the floor!"

With the Liars Club Award in mind, Jack Louis suggested that the first name of the character Jim would play on the new program should be something synonymous with a liar.

JIM JORDAN: ". . . At the next meeting Don Quinn came in with a slip of paper. I'll never forget this, it was about an inch high and eight inches wide. He had it all decorated up like a commercial artist would do. On it it said: 'FIBBER McGEE'. He put the paper down on the desk - and that was it!"

Finding an appropriate character name for Marian proved to be a more difficult matter.

JIM JORDAN: "When Marian was doing 'Nora Smith' on the SMITH FAMILY series we didn't care much for the first name and agreed that if she ever got to do that Irish character again we'd name her MOLLY. The name was a favorite of ours and was taken from the song, 'Molly, Oh, Molly, Oh,' which we both liked very much."

There was also a definite significance to the phrasing of the program's title: FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY, as opposed to--FIBBER AND MOLLY McGEE. The phrasing related back to a husband and wife vaudeville team, Ned Argo and Virginia, that the Jordans had recalled. They both liked the sound of the act's billing. Hence, the choice of billing--FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY.

Along with Paul Bunyan and Baron Munchausen, Fibber McGee ranks with the best of the tall tale tellers. Others may have gained reknown for similar ability, but none with more facile tongue than that perpetual prevaricator, Fibber McGee.

Back in the "good old days," long before radio and television had displaced the art of "living room conversation," story-telling had been a chief source of family entertainment. In the state of Pennsylvania, in one particular area, Pike County, more tall-tale-tellers had been turned out than in any other geographical location, Peoria excluded. One of Pike County's best story tellers was the legendary Lige Pelton. Pelton is reported to have told some mighty big whoppers in his day. Someone once set down old Lige's "recipe" for a tall tale--and for those who might be interested, here it is:



Fibber and Molly autograph a huge Zenith radio at station WWJ for 'The Detroit News Give-a-Radio' campaign for Detroit shut-ins. The set was offered at a charity auction with proceeds used to purchase smaller sets for shut-ins.

*"To make a tall story, first you take a modicum of fact, mix it with a lot of plausible circumstances; blend in plenty of descriptive words and well-rounded paragraphs; stir in: times, places, characteristics and psychological situations; flavor with quantities of highly-colored imagination; sweeten with a dash of moral observation--and serve without apologies."*

The NBC publicity department gave the new FIBBER McGEE show plenty of advance ballyhoo. A premiere airing date was set for April 16, 1935.

The last broadcast of SMACKOUT at WMAQ before the Jordans departed for New York City and the debut of their new show, was one that Marian and Jim would never forget. The crew at the station perpetrated a prank on them.. Ordinarily the show went on the air at 9:05 a.m., but that last day when they arrived at the studio someone rushed up to them shouting:

"Hurry up! You go on at nine sharp this morning."

Marian and Jim made a frantic dash for the microphone and started to talk promptly at the stroke of nine. They had hardly begun their usual daily routine of patter when the announcer clumsily dropped the chimes to the floor making a terrible clatter. Jim tried to cover by ad-libbing a quick: "Who threw that?" A moment later a stranger burst into the studio whistling and paused just long enough to pipe up, in a very loud voice:

"Oh! You're on the air!"

He then proceeded to whistle gaily. Just about that time the clumsy announcer bumped into the microphone practically knocking it off its stand as the production manager shouted from across the studio for the sound effects man to hurry and clear the studio. By this time the Jordans were adlibbing right and left in their efforts to cover up the uproar. They had begun to suspect that it might all be a prank, but not being certain--they didn't dare risk stopping the program.

After another series of noisy interruptions--and just as the studio clock read 9:04--it was finally revealed to them that they had not been on the air, and were scheduled for their regular 9:05 time. There was less than a minute to calm themselves before the actual broadcast began.



An early ad for Fibber McGee and Molly.

### First Fibber McGee Broadcasts

Marian and Jim were still chuckling about that unforgettable SMACKOUT broadcast as they packed their well-worn valises for the trip east. Too excited to sleep, they sat up all night on the train to New York City. Cautious and frugal, they took a small suite with a kitchenette and set up light housekeeping at the Beaux Arts Hotel for their month's stay in the big city. Most of the blase city slickers they encountered in the bustling metropolis were not exactly sure how to take these simple "country folk." It was the most exciting time of their lives and at last April 16th arrived.

Just before the final dress rehearsal of the broadcast, Chester Lauck and Norris Goff, better known as LUM AND ABNER, stopped in at the studio to wish them well. As the anxious audience began to assemble in the studio, Marian and Jim spotted another old friend, Elinor Harriott, who was a cast member of the Amos 'n Andy program. They were ecstatic when they saw that those very popular radio favorites George Burns and Gracie Allen were also on hand to witness their debut with the McGee show. The hands on the clock in Studio 8-H seemed a bit shaky as they indicated "Air Time" and the red light flashed--ON THE AIR!

What was that first broadcast like? A radio fan magazine of the time offers a few clues:

"In the front row of Studio 8-H at NBC, filled with a giggling expectant audience, sits a couple looking like a pair of sightseers from the country. Rico Marcelli, on a high podium, commands a lively air from the band and the show begins. . . . The country cousins edge up to the microphone--you might take them for curious intruders, were it not for the scripts in their hands. . . . She wears a frowsy cotton print dress, fitting her like a sack. Above her naive face perches a kettle-shaped hat with a crazily swaying black feather. He, with battered straw hat, ill-fitting horn-rimmed spectacles, one-button striped suit, is the conventional 'rube'--right down to his bright orange colored shoes.

They are--FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY!"

A review of that historic premier read as follows:

1 DAY ONLY **FRI. JAN. 22**



## IN PERSON

FOR FOUR COMPLETE STAGE SHOWS  
at 2:50 — 5:00 — 7:10 — 9:15

Your Popular N.B.C. Radio Funsters—The Most Hilarious Stars on Tour

# FIBBER MCGEE *and* MOLLY

*You've Heard Them On The Radio  
Now Hear and See Them!*

C'MON! BRING THE FAMILY—THEY'LL HAVE THE TIME OF  
THEIR LIFE, and ATTEND the MATINEE to Avoid Night Crowds!

On The Screen  
DONALD WOOD and JEAN MUIR  
in Warner Bros. Thrilling Drama

## "ONCE A DOCTOR"

EXTRA — Hilarious Comedy Hit — Color Specialty!

# OSHKOSH

THEATRE IN OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN

PRICES: — Matinee 30c — Nite 40c — Children 10c

During the early days of broadcasting the McGee program, the Jordans continued to make personal appearances, usually on Friday and Saturday nights, five or six times a year until the onset of Marian's long illness. Here's a poster announcing a January 22, 1936 appearance at Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

"Comedy, orchestra and vocalists. Sponsored by S. C. Johnson Company - NBC network. FIBBER McGEE aided by his wife and heckler, MOLLY, contributes a funny and enjoyable program, one in fact that is likely to send the name of the team into the higher bracketed radio field. . . Fibber isn't actually a new wrinkle. . . He is sort of an 'Irish Baron Munchausen' . . . but the combination of good delivery with good material insures success. First show was well paced and liberally sprinkled with laughs. Storyline involves Fibber's adventures as a tourist and his propensity for murdering the truth. His monolog on the question 'When a Red Light is a Dead Light' was very good. Ditto his story about Ermitrude the camel. . . . Supporting are Ulderico Marcelli's orchestra, and Ronnie and Van, duet. Kathleen Wells is soloist and handled her two numbers very nicely. . . . Harlow Wilcox, the announcer, doubled in foiling for Fibber, while the latter also delivered some gag commercials on auto wax. . . ."

Another critic found the show ". . . a program with all the freshness of an alfalfa field after a rain, in spring. . ." However, not all of the critics were that favorable. A review of the McGee premier in Variety stated, in part:

VARIETY: ". . . Stacked up more as a slipshod musical half hour than a refreshing down-to-earth comedy serial. Dialogue weak, with continuity continuously broken up by orchestrations and rural atmospheric sounds. Marian and Jim Jordan play the leading characters, a combo of hen-pecked husband and wise-cracking wife. The nickname explains the kind of humor unrolled. Femme's brogue is definitely Irish, while husband relays in a hinterland twang. No special reason for either of these varied assortment of tongues. . . Nary a real out-and-out laugh in the lot, excepting, just once in a while, a carefully planned gag would be timed correctly. Again, the script limitations hampered the duo from ever getting underway. . . . Auto patter plentiful, with filling stations, mechanics, etc., worked into the story, but it was none too clever. Enamel talk was handled by Harlow Wilcox, who killed a few quips due to his premature laughs. Middle class sound effects never struck an authentic chord. Automobiles chugging, came over like a motor boat pulling into dock. . . . As it stands, program demands stiffer pacing, punchier lines, and more of Fibber and his frau. . . ."

No matter how severe the negative reports were, the Jordans and Quinn were encouraged by the fact that there had been a unanimous "positive stance" taken towards the main characters themselves. Quinn began to ease off on the "rube" traits and added subtle refinements. Gradually, Fibber was molded into a milder and more

**Admission FREE**  
**for you and your family**  
**to see and hear . . .**



**Fibber McGee**  
**and Molly** RADIO'S FAMOUS  
 COMEDIANS

in a special broadcast of their regular  
 Monday night program, from **RADIOLAND**  
**CLEVELAND CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION**

**MONDAY, JULY 27 • TWO SHOWS - 7 P. M. AND 11 P. M.**  
 WITH **TED WEEMS** AND HIS ORCHESTRA  
 Admission FREE to Exposition Visitors. Free Will Contribution

**SPECIAL ADDED ATTRACTION!**  
**Toto Laverne, of French Casino**  
**in Person!**

Admission FREE to Exposition Visitors. Free Will Contribution

likable blowhard, while Molly became less shrewish, wittier, and a much more lovable and devoted wife. Faith and hard work did the trick. The names of FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY would soon be indelibly etched on listeners' lists of radio favorites.

## Rising Popularity

In the beginning there had been nothing subtle about the McGee brand of humor. However, it was as honest as the kitchen sink. The laughter the comic couple evoked was infectious. Their popular appeal spread from the rural communities to the small towns. From there, it spilled over into the big towns and eventually crept into the sophisticated cities. Little by little, the McGee programs gained an ever-increasing audience, ranging from farmers to financiers. Within a year's time, most of the show's severest critics began to change their tune.

On February 12, 1936, a VARIETY review noted:

"Since first reviewed early in 1935, this program has undergone a change of personnel and a stepping up of tempo. . . . The program is now delivering a lot of entertainment. Essentially comedy, the pursuit of giggles is along broad and obvious lines. Broad and obvious is always okay for radio, but in this case, a nice timing of gags, and intelligent writing of the dialog has lifted the proceedings above the snappy level that the same material and situations could very easily degenerate into if not given smart treatment. Smartness spreads beyond the entertainment, and includes the commercial spelling, which is reasonable, yet forceful.

. . .

In November 1936, Radio Guide Magazine cited the program for "wearing a Halo of Honesty and a Wreath of Good Will" and presented them with its Medal of Merit Award.

From their earliest days of performing, the Jordans had made a hobby of collecting various types of hats and headgear, most of the comic variety. The collection numbered well over 200 different kinds. Late in 1935 Marian and Jim exhibited their hat collection at the National Hobby Show in Chicago. At the time, there was a traveling "Fibber McGee and Molly" marionette show touring the Chicago area and the Jordans posed for some publicity photos with their marionette look-alikes.

True to the tank town tourists they portrayed on the air, Marian and Jim continued to "dress up in costume" for their broadcasts. This custom was dropped in late 1937 when such a radio

# HOW A BIG NATIONAL RADIO PROGRAM HELPS A LOCAL DEALER SELL GOODS



A page from a large, four-color, twelve page promotional brochure prepared for S.C. Johnson and Son, Inc. (1936).

broadcasting custom was universally set aside. Later, however, Marian became widely known in radio fashion circles for her simple, and tasteful attire.. In 1940 she was named "Best Dressed Woman in Radio Comedy" by a panel of the Fashion Academy, comprised of more than one hundred of the nation's leading designers.

There are very few candid photos of the McGee show taken during broadcasts and for a very good reason. As anxious as Jim was to have his picture taken for the papers and magazines, he did not allow photographers to work while the show was on the air. He felt it distracted both the performers and the audience, and therefore, was unfair to all.

Originally, the McGees were depicted as tourists roaming around the country in their beat-up jalopy. Without fail, whenever Fibber brought his old flivver to a screeching sudden stop, he'd mutter (without much conviction) "I've got to get those brakes fixed one of these days." The expression, along with Fibber's procrastinations, became a long-running gag on the program.

The very first McGee broadcast found Fibber and Molly driving along Highway #79. On the early broadcasts, announcer Harlow Wilcox often introduced the pair to listeners with something like: "...your fugitives from formality, your flivving, four-cylinder philosophers" and . . . "those gay and garrulous gadders, those gasoline gondoliers," as well as . . . "that dippy, dizzy duo, those distinctive destroyers of dullness--FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY!"

Under Don Quinn's skillful writing, the characters began to take shape, although McGee and his missus remained definite stereotypes. He was "Everyman," in what he did, said, and believed. A childlike showoff, he compulsively acted out his fantasies from week to week--never lacking in a scheme or two for getting rich quick. Exaggeration and overstatement were his trademarks. Without exception, Fibber became the butt of his own schemes. Most of the show's laughs came at his expense. Fibber never held a steady job and lacked responsibility. He was, nonetheless, a dutiful, though slightly hen-pecked husband. He loved Molly very much, but had a difficult time telling her so.

For her part, Molly was always a bit smarter than her spouse and much more practical. She shared her hubby's dreams for getting rich overnight, but was wise enough to know that the dreams were foolish and were doomed to failure before they had begun. She never let on though, at least not to the fanciful Fibber. What's more, Molly was a sentimentalist. She was head-over-heels in love with her husband and didn't much care who knew it. On the



Marion Jordan, who is Fibber's Molly, looks like this when she's not in radio costume.



In early broadcasts the versatile voice of Marian Jordan was heard in a variety of character roles including feisty 'Grandma Wheedledeck' seen here in character make-up for the role.

Valentine Day program in 1942, she recalled how she and Mr. McGee had carved their initials on a tree behind the schoolhouse back in Peoria in 1909. Mr. McGee tried to correct her by stating that it wasn't the schoolhouse, but the brewery. But Molly would have none of that blarney. After a brief exchange of "yes it was" and "no it wasn't," romantic Molly stated emphatically:

"McGee, it's got to be the schoolhouse. For the last thirty years I've been tellin' people that. And I'm not gonna go change it now. Besides, there's nothing romantic about a brewery!"

## Wistful Vista

In the fall of 1935, the program underwent its first major change when the Johnson Wax Co. decided to switch the emphasis from its Car-nu car wax product, to the promotion of their new line of floor wax products. With this in mind, there was no longer any need for the McGees to remain roaming tourists. At last it became feasible for them to settle down somewhere in mid-America and take roots. And thus the town of Wistful Vista came into being.

On the program of August 26, 1935, the McGees stopped off in a little town called Wistful Vista where the Hagglemeyer Realty Development Company was in the process of a big sales promotion. McGee bought a two dollar raffle ticket on a house, primarily because the purchase of same entitled the holder to an unlimited number of free sandwiches. The lucky number in the raffle was #13-13-13 and was drawn by Miss Susie Glotz, "Miss Hagglemeyer Development of 1935." The holder of the winning ticket was none other than Mr. Fibber McGee, who promptly fainted.

The house that the McGees won was located at #79 Wistful Vista. Years later, on the broadcast of February 15, 1939, Fibber was flabbergasted when he accidentally discovered that their house number was not #79, but in reality, #81. The original number had been obscured for many years by an overgrown lilac bush and had become mistaken. Be what may, the McGees continued to use #79 as their legal address.

During the first year on the air as the McGees, Marian and Jim also portrayed some other characters as well. Many were carryovers from the SMACKOUT program: Teeny, Geraldine, old lady Wheedledeck, Mrs. Wearybottom, and the Toopses. With the advantage of a program budget, Don Quinn wrote in many additional characters and these supporting roles were played by



Owlsh looking Don Quinn was a gag writer and cartoonist from Michigan when he first met the Jordans in 1931. He began writing 'Smackout' for them and in 1935 he helped create 'Fibber McGee and Molly.' Their amiable relationship lasted through 1950 when he left to pursue other projects.

other actors. Among those heard in supporting roles during the first season were: Katherine Avery - Clare Baum - Tom Blanchard - Malcom Clair - Bernardine Flynn - Betty Lou Gerson - Herbert Hand - Sam (Schlepperman) Hearn - Henry Hoople - Lucille Hustings - Bruce Kamman - Lester Luther - Jack Mather - Tom Post - Ed Prentiss - Bud Schaffer - Hugh Studebaker and Margaret Thomas. Special guest appearances were also made by such personalities as "Uncle Ezra" (Pat Barrett), tangle-tongue comedian, Charles Wilson, and Frankie Masters.

The show's earliest musical theme was "Save Your Sorrow for Tomorrow," written by B.G. DeSylva and Al Sherman in 1925. For a brief period beginning in October 1937, a new theme, "Laugh Your Way Through Life," was tried, but was soon dropped and the original theme was reinstated. "Save Your Sorrow . . ." was used as the show's theme through the fall of 1940 after which an original theme entitled "Wing to Wing", which had been written by Billy Mills, was heard. There was also a secondary theme entitled "Ridin' Around in the Rain." At times various other themes were tried for brief periods.

A very large portion of the show's success was due to writer Don Quinn, who, along with Paul Rhymer, the creator of VIC AND SADE, and comedian/writer Fred Allen, must be considered among the foremost contributors to American radio comedy. Quinn was a jovial ex-cartoonist whose horn-rimmed glasses and portly figure gave him a slightly owlsh look. Not only was he the Jordans chief writer and three-way partner, he was also their very valued friend. Their business relationship was based solely on a friendly handshake. Marian and Jim never failed to credit Don with an equal share of the show's success.

Quinn had set himself a very simple set of rules governing the writing of the program:

"Be fair in all things; don't offend people; don't hurt their feelings, Keep it clean--and keep it friendly--and it will keep you."

Marian and Jim also maintained a close hand in choosing story lines and in supplying story ideas. They always worked in very close harmony with their writers. The program reflected their own lifestyle, where they had come from, and what they had been. The action usually centered around Fibber's badly bungled attempt to do some simple household task, or of his thinking up some impossible scheme to get rich quick. As he tried to untangle himself from life's inevitable little irritations, the McGee's abode at 79 Wistful Vista would be visited by a steady flow of colorful characters conceived by Don Quinn. Most of these neighbors had whimsical names and each seemed to have some outlandish private



NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY, Inc.

CHICAGO STUDIOS

MERCHANDISE MART



PROGRAM

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY

ADMIT ONE

MONDAY SEP 30

GOOD FOR THIS DATE AND PROGRAM ONLY

7:00 P.M.

VOID IF SOLD 1935 SEE REVERSE SIDE

One of two tickets intended for the Jordan's children to attend the broadcast of September 30, 1935. Instead Kathryn and Jim, Jr., took part in the program by singing a duet of a lively tune titled 'Piccolino.'

obsessions and many eccentricities. Presiding over it all with abundant good humor and an occasional firm word, was the ever dependable and thoroughly lovable Molly McGee. She always managed to maintain some sense of reason amidst the insanity of the situation surrounding her. The success of each individual script was based solidly on the belief that, if the situation was intrinsically humorous, the result would be a good time for everyone.

The Jordans were both nearing the age of forty, when fame and fortune finally found them. The pair had always been hard-working, honest and unpretentious. They were both touchingly and sincerely grateful for their success that had been such a long time in coming.

When, at last, Marian and Jim realized that success was theirs, they refused to allow the fact to alter their lifestyle. One luxury they did allow themselves was a newly built home in the Peterson Woods section of Chicago. But it was not an ostentatious showplace--far from it. A few doors down the street from the small house they had been renting for a number of years, stood a vacant lot. When fortune smiled upon them bountifully, the Jordans purchased that lot and the new home they had built on it was exactly like the one they had been renting, with a few added improvements. This simple act is typical of Marian and Jim Jordan, plain simple-living folks from Peoria.

Another "luxury," which was really more in the way of a necessity, was the acquisition of a press agent, Tom Fizdale. The Needham, Louis and Brorby Agency hired Fizdale and assigned him, not only to the Jordans, but to the entire Fibber McGee show. He was highly proficient in publicizing the show and its stars. He constantly thought up new angles to keep their names before the public. Fizdale also served as a sort of advisor to the Jordans in their private business as well. He convinced Jim to finance the career of a young boxer, as was the vogue for other prominent radio personalities to do at the time. As a result, Jim sponsored Milt Aron, one of the top welterweight boxing contenders of the day.

When Fizdale gave up the position as press agent in 1938, a public relations woman was hired to do the job. She was assisted by Bill Walsh, who later became an important name in the motion picture producing business. When Jim Jordan decided to sell the rights to the Fibber McGee show to NBC in 1949, he made an arrangement with the MCA Agency to represent them. It was the first time in their long career that Marian and Jim had personally hired an agent.



Jim and Marian were both nearing the age of 40 when fame and fortune finally found them. The pair had always been hard-working, honest and unpretentious. They were both touchingly and sincerely grateful for the success that had been such a long time in coming.

## The Program's Personality Develops

Once the personalities of the McGees and their Wistful Vista neighbors had been firmly established, the show settled down comfortably into a regular Tuesday night time slot and a work pattern was formulated. On Thursdays, Quinn would meet with the Jordans and present his written ideas for the following week's program for their careful perusal. There would be a very thorough and amiable discussion during which Marian and Jim would inject their own ideas. Quinn would then return to his office and begin to work on a script. Additional consultations with the Jordans, as well as the show's producers, was followed by more rewriting.

On Sunday afternoons Quinn would meet again with the Jordans at their home with a completed draft of the script. They would read their lines while Quinn substituted for the other actors. He would read the lines with great expression, imitating, as nearly as possible, the other actors' voices. The read-through was followed by more discussion, while additional ideas would be exchanged and worked into the script before Quinn would polish it for airing.

On Monday mornings the full cast would assemble at the NBC rehearsal studios for a long day's workout. Deletions would be made, and other lines added. All members of the cast were given free rein to express ideas. If the show's best lines landed in the mouth of one of the supporting players, neither Marian nor Jim ever raised an objection. There was a very close working relationship and the good of the program, as a whole, was everyone's main objective.

Tuesday mornings were spent on a full dress rehearsal with music and sound effects. The afternoon was used for relaxation and talking over ideas for future shows. Faithful listeners who tuned in week after week, came to know Fibber as a natural born helper-outer and a whimsical windbag with a propensity for prevarication and a great gift of gab. McGee also had a terrific talent for illustrious, illogical, and awesome alliterations. To wit:

"Punch-bowl McGee, I was known as in those days. Pronounced by press and public as the Pugilistic Pixie of the pedigreed paper-weight pugs, pummelling pudgy palookas, pulverizing proboscuses and paralyzing plug-uglies. Pounding a peach of a punch that plunked the punks on their piazzas. The Ping-Pong Poppa of the pineapple punch. A peculiar poke that petrified the pit of the paunch of the pillow-pushers who plopped to the platform, too pop-eyed to protest!"

And: . . .



During the early 1930's Marian and Jim Jordan made many guest appearances on network radio programs such as 'Saturday Night Jamboree', 'National ' Farm and Home Hour' and Don McNeil's 'Breakfast Club.'

"Pretty-Please-McGee, I was known as in those days. Pretty-Please-McGee, proclaimed by the press and public. The peerless prosecutor of pilfering pickpockets, political parasites and persons performing petty peccadilloes. Putting prison-pajamas on poker players preyin' on poor punks with peculiar pasteboards. Pleadin' with passion and pathos for poor people in pretty pickles - a peppy personality with a capital 'P'!"

As well as: . . .

"I can shoot like sixty with a thirty-thirty. Why, when I was a boy, I learned to shoot when I was wootin' a couple of cowgirls. Woo-Woo-McGee and the Wallopin' Wonder O' the West, wild-eyed waddy of Wyoming, weavin' a wobbly wagon over the wanderin' wasteland, waylayin' the wily wolf with my wicked Winchester, wanglin' my weary wall-eyed war-horse from waterhole to waterhole, and word for word, the weather-beatenest Wampus of the Western World, from the warm wigwams of Wyandotte, to the wild woods of Walla Walla."

And: . . .

"I was the top tin can designer for the Town Talk Tuna Company and I turned out tuna tins by the ton. I had a type of tin in two tones of tan that was the talk of the tuna trade, but one tan turned two tones too tawny, so I had to tone down the tawny tan and tone up the other tan so the tuna tin I turned out was the finest two-tone tan tuna tin in town. I used tons of tan, and tens of tons of tin, in turning out the toniest two-tone tan tuna tin they ever tinned tuna in. Kept me pretty busy turning out tins and between the tons of tan and the tons of tin - the tan on the tin, and the tuna in the tin, the two-tone tins with the tawny tone of the tons and tan and tins and . . ."

Sometimes Fibber would combine more than one type of tongue twister:

". . . We're gonna paint the town red. We're goin' out and toss a torrid two-step or two. . . . I'm a hep cat tonight. I got a brain full of boogie and a jumper full of jive. I'm a wild-eyed wampus from the wavin' woogie and this is my night to sock the maracas."

Other examples of typical tongue-twisters that tumbled from the master's tongue:

"Faucet-Fixer McGee I was known as in them days. . . .Faucet Fixer McGee, first and foremost fishhook fancier, flusevalve finagglor and firearm fusser, famous fanatic on fairness and forever featuring frying pans, fencewire, feather dusters, fly-swatter and frog-spears."

"Morse Code McGee, I was known as in them days . . . Morse Code McGee, miracle man of message and magnificent mental



Radio photo of Jim Jordan made up as the McGee's obnoxious neighbor, Mort Toops. (1936).

marvel, making monkeys of minor minion messing with Morse."

And one final example, and possibly the most difficult:

"The Bakersfield Bakery used big batches of batter for bakin' and they liked their batter beat with butter. . . . Now some of the batter-beaters beat some awful bitter batter, but the batter I beat made better-beaten batches - and baby, I beat batter by the barrel!. . . We had about as beat-up a bunch of bakers as ever balled up a batch of batter. but the reason my batter baked better was because I beat my batter in a platter - which made a better batter, splattered the platter, scattered the batter, sputtered the butter, buttered the platter and beat the BeJunior out of the butter . . ."

Hardly ever did Jim err in delivering one of the complex alliterations, but on November 16, 1948, his tongue must have twisted, because in the last segment of the above he accidentally read:

". . . but the reason my batter baked better was because I beat my batter in a platter - which made a better batter, splattered the bladder and . . ."

The audience and cast were convulsed with laughter as he momentarily hesitated to untie his twisted tongue.

According to a 1937 publicity release:

"McGee has a unique formula for his non-stumble success. The first time he reads the lines he balances a loaded laundry basket on his head and is so concerned with his uppermost difficulty, that he has no time to worry over enunciation."

Fibber's bravado was also generously sprinkled with amusing definitions, such as:

"Them springs are tighter than a forty-dollar girdle after a spaghetti dinner" and "A committee is a small group of un-qualified, appointed by the un-thinking, to undertake the utterly un-necessary."

In January of 1936, the program had a rating of only 6.6, but by January of 1937 it had climbed all the way up to 13.

The fictional McGees always spoke to each other in terms of endearment. It is interesting to note that Molly never called her husband, "Fibber,"--instead, she referred to him as either "McGee" or "Himself." She also called him "dearie," and he, in return, would refer to her as "kiddo," "tootsie," and "snooky." In 1945 he took to calling her "Mommie," and she sometimes was heard to say, "McGee--wait for Baby!"

Marian and Jim were more than just husband and wife, they were partners--and pals.

Don Quinn cleverly kept the comedy close to realities of everyday life. Lovable Molly was always the understanding wife, ever close



*'Tain't funny*

*McGee*

at hand with a loyal heart--and, when necessary--a cryptic remark. If Fibber had to be lowered a peg or two, she was just the one to do it. She ridiculed his pomposity and could point out his shortcomings without getting her finger in his eye. And she was always the first to defend him if someone dared challenge his character. Somehow her sharpest needlings never really seemed to completely deflate his super ego. Molly's most memorable catch phrases were "HEAVENLY DAYS" and "T'aint Funny, McGee!" She always delivered same with a bit o' the old brogue, while Fibber frequently uttered an exasperated, "Ah, pshaw!" Another of Molly's earliest colorful expressions was "Ye big Loogan!"

At times Quinn would throw the listeners an unexpected curve by reversing the catch phrases. On the broadcast of June 18, 1940, Fibber and Molly traded their most familiar expressions, with Fibber heard muttering: "Heavenly Days," and "T'aint Funny, Molly!". while his missus uttered Fibber's vile oath of "Dad rat it!" A very unexpected curve was pitched by Quinn on the broadcast of June 16, 1942, when he had Molly say: "That's very funny, McGee!" And on February 16, 1940, the Old Timer startled McGee when he announced: "That's exactly the way I heard it, Johnny!"

Some of the comedy and character traits of the McGees were a bit raucous and rowdy during their first year of broadcasting. On the broadcast of December 30, 1935, the merry-making McGees went out to a night club to celebrate New Year's eve and Molly got up on a table and danced a jig. Hardly the kind of thing the latter day Molly, in all her modesty, would have contemplated. In fact, the muchly mellowed McGees of later broadcasts rarely dined out--and never went nightclubbing. As writer Quinn began to evolve the characters, many subtle changes took place. Fibber McGee and Molly became more like Jim and Marian Jordan.

Part of the change was in having the McGees become more culture-conscious. On the broadcast of January 6, 1936, the modified McGees gave a helpful hand in promoting the "Wistful Vista Varieties," in which they performed no less than the balcony scene from Shakespeare's, Romeo and Juliet. In celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday that year, Fibber wrote, directed, produced and acted in a dramatic production of "Pocohontas" for the newly-formed "Wistful Vista Literary, Pinochle and Drama Club." The club held its meetings in the McGee's living room. On February 8, 1937, the same group presented a production of "Cinderella", with Fibber as Prince Charming.

During the 1938 season Don Quinn took on an assistant writer, Winsor "Win" Anderson.



Announcer Harlow Wilcox and Fibber McGee discuss the time of the show during a rehearsal (January 1936).

## Harlow Wilcox Delivers the Sponsors' Word

Beginning with the premiere broadcast, Harlow Wilcox was the announcer for the program, as well as serving as "straightman" for Fibber. The Wilcox style of delivery was glibly pleasant and he was aptly dubbed "The Old Mikes-tro." In early broadcasts he sometimes referred to himself as "Car-Flow Wilcox." He is especially remembered for his poise and element of believability, no matter how frivolous the situation. Quinn deftly wove the commercials into the main fabric of the program. Wilcox's commercial spiels were never an intrusion. On the contrary, they became some of radio's least obtrusive "commercial interludes." Quinn carefully geared the commercials for both laughs and sales effectiveness and they often became an integral part of the continuity.

Three brief commercials were worked into each broadcast. The opening pitch came at the very opening of the show and was a one-minute spot, after which the theme music would swell and then he would introduce the situation.

To cite an example, the March 9, 1943 program which was entitled, "Visiting the Dairy," was introduced thusly:

*WILCOX: "Human beings are all actuated by three basic motives. Money, love and hunger. The squire of 79 Wistful Vista hasn't enough money to worry about. He's happily married, but he's never yet had enough to eat. He thinks. So, here, one hour after lunch, he's fortifying himself with a glass of milk as we meet - FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY."*

The second commercial came midway and was always well-integrated into the plot. Wilcox would usually visit the McGees in their home, or encounter them in the street. He would begin to brag about the beautiful finish Johnson's Wax gave to floors and furniture. Often the McGees would rib him about his fanatical infatuation with floor wax.

The final commercial came at the close of the show and lasted about forty-five seconds. Then the McGees would return to the microphone to deliver the closing tag gag and Molly's famous "Goodnight, all." Then in whatever time remained, Wilcox would hastily deliver a final reminder to buy the sponsor's products.

The show's advertising was unique in two ways. Firstly, for the fact that one sponsor remained with the program for such a long run on prime time. And, secondly, Wilcox's "sales pitches"



Genial Harry Von Zell was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on July 11, 1906. He began in radio as a singer in 1927 and subsequently became a staff announcer. A year later he was chosen by Paul Whiteman to announce his program. He worked on many of the top radio shows. On rare occasions he substituted for Harlow Wilcox on the McGee show.

remained basically the same from the time in 1935 when the McGees first settled in Wistful Vista, to the day that the wax company ceased sponsoring the program. As a result of the long time sponsorship and the clever way the commercials had been used as part of the show's proceedings, the Johnson Wax Company built up a very strong sponsorship identification. FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY - and Johnson's Wax became virtually synonymous.

In the program's earliest days, the genial announcer began to refer to Fibber as "Pal," and McGee retaliated by calling Wilcox - "Harpo." This may have been due to the fact that Harlow continually "harped" about the virtues of the sponsor's products. For similar reasons McGee also called the announcer "Waxy." Another name that was given him was "Omaha," referring, of course to Harlow's birthplace. The announcer's smooth delivery was just about as slick as the purported finish of the sponsor's products. With a change of sponsorship in 1950 to Pet Milk products, Wilcox became known as "Milky" for obvious reasons. His quick wit often earned him laughs on his own and occasionally he would break himself up.

Wilcox was heard on almost every half-hour program. During the fall of 1936, he was critically ill with a ruptured appendix and missed several broadcasts, for which announcer Bob Brown substituted. He was also absent on a few other rare occasions.

On January 4, 1944, Harry Von Zell substituted for him and returned to the program the following week to hound Wilcox for some remuneration for his services. Von Zell subbed again on March 21, 1944 when Wilcox was absent due to the death of his brother.

A highly unusual thing occurred during the opening of the broadcast for May 3, 1949. Announcer Wilcox had some trouble with his usual resonant voice as he began to deliver the opening sales pitch. He coughed several times and excused himself, then tried to continue, but couldn't. After a brief pause he gasped:

"I can't . . . talk . . . Better have . . . some . . . music . . ."

The Billy Mills orchestra began to play a lively tune. Later on in the show, Wilcox recovered his voice, but Jim Jordan, as "Fibber," delivered the mid-show commercial. No on-the-air explanation was offered to the listeners. Such were the hazards of live broadcasting.



Herbert F. Johnson, Jr., grandson of S.C. Johnson, founder of the Johnson Wax Co. It was his decision in 1933 to gamble advertising dollars in the radio broadcasting business. Two years later he gambled once again with the relatively unknown husband and wife comedy team, Jim and Marian Jordan. The Jordans gained world wide fame as FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY. Their names became synonymous with Johnson Wax, who continued sponsorship for more than 15 years.

## A WORD - NOT FROM - BUT ABOUT THE SPONSOR

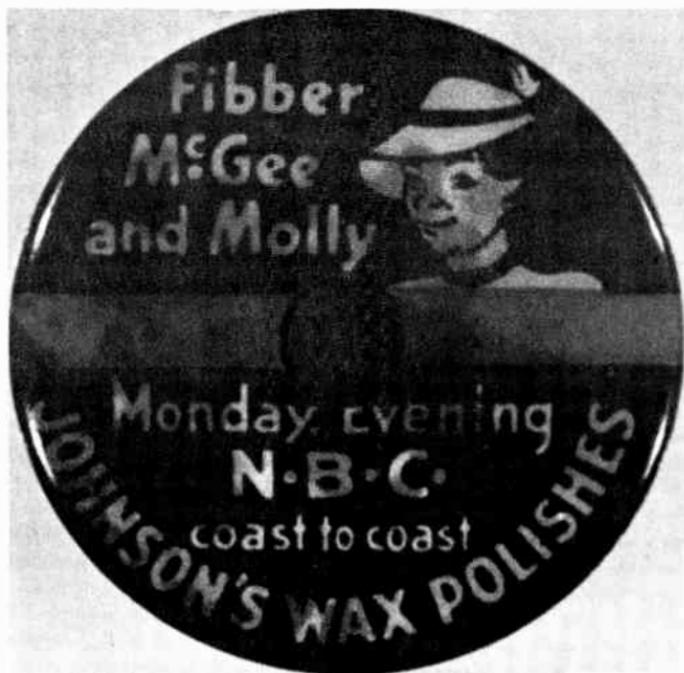
In 1886 Samuel C. Johnson, a parquet flooring salesman in Racine, Wisconsin, decided to purchase the flooring business from his employer, the Racine Hardware Company. With a work force of two men and two boys, he founded the company that still bears his name more than a century later!

Although Johnson's company started as a parquet flooring business, it soon diversified into 'the prepared paste wax business. It entered world markets and used science and technology to develop more innovative products. In 1906 Herbert F. Johnson, Sr. became a partner and the name of the firm was changed to S.C. Johnson & Son. In 1914 the company expanded overseas. The following year the first shipment of wax products headed for England was lost when the ship was sunk by a German submarine. In 1919 Samuel Johnson died and his son Herbert succeeded him as president of the company.

In 1928 Mr. Johnson's twenty-eight year old grandson, Herbert Fisk Johnson, Jr., a graduate of Cornell University, who had worked in the company's chemical department, and had also served as both salesman and purchasing agent, became president of the company. At the time the firm had only five hundred employees and three foreign-based subsidiaries. Herbert Johnson built the company up to over ten thousand employees, working in some forty different countries - making the company a worldwide corporation.

During the depression years, Herbert Johnson operated the company without laying off a single employee. In 1932 when business looked its bleakest, he introduced a new product, 'Glo-Coat', which went on to become one of the world's best known floor waxes. During the 1930's he commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the firm's Administration and Research Center located in Racine. The unique structure was opened in April of 1939 and has been termed 'the greatest innovation in business housing since the skyscraper.' It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, Wright also designed the Johnson family estate 'Wingspread' also in Wisconsin.

In 1933 Herbert Johnson took an advertising gamble and put his firm into the radio broadcasting business when the company began to sponsor the Tony Wons radio program. Two years later Johnson gambled again with the relatively unknown husband and wife



During March of 1936 a set of two miniature spinning tops depicting Fibber and Molly were offered to listeners through the mail. Only one complete set is known to exist.

comedy team, Jim and Marian Jordan. As FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY they became one of the top radio programs in the country. The Johnson Wax Company continued to sponsor the program for a total of fifteen years and six weeks, one of the longest associations in broadcasting history. For the entire duration, the same announcer, Harlow Wilcox, delivered the company's commercial messages. On the broadcast of September 23, 1935, Mr. Johnson made a brief appearance and told of his forthcoming three month expedition by air to the northeastern section of Brazil to obtain carnauba wax for the company's products.

Herbert Johnson retired as company president in 1958 and remained Chairman of the Board through 1966. He died at the age of seventy-nine on December 13, 1978.

### Contests, Premiums and Games

As was the custom on radio shows of the era, several contests and free premiums were offered to listeners. Harlow Wilcox always announced these promotions with a great deal of enthusiasm.

The "give-aways" began on the very first broadcast when a 40 cent can of Johnson's Touch-Up Enamel was offered "free" along with the purchase of any one of the sponsor's other products, Auto Wax and Auto Cleaner. On December 9, 1935 came the announcement that the Johnson Company, in collaboration with band leader Rico Marcelli and the Irving Berlin Music Publishing Co., would conduct a Song-writing Contest. To the winning composer of an original song went a cash price of \$100 plus free publication of the song, with royalties to be paid to the composer. Reportedly, 10,000 would-be song writers submitted entries before the contest closed on January 1, 1936.

On the program of March 2, 1936, Wilcox announced that listeners could obtain a unique free premium by sending in a tracing of the letters "G-I-o C-o-a-t" from a can of the sponsor's product. The premium consisted of a set of two Miniature Spinning Tops. One top was yellow with a drawing of Fibber, while the other was blue, with a drawing of Molly. Each carried the wording "Fibber McGee and Molly - Monday Evening - NBC Coast-to-Coast - Johnson's Wax Polishes." The offer was valid for a two-month period through April 30th.

In observance of Johnson's 50th Anniversary, on May 4, 1936,



In October 1941 listeners could obtain a free composite photograph of the Fibber McGee cast with the purchase of a pint-size can of Johnson's Glo-Coat furniture polish.

came the offer of two free gifts with the purchase of Johnson's Glo Coat - a free bottle of Johnson's Furniture Polish, and a free jar of Johnson's Silver Polish.

On September 28, 1936, a Fibber McGee Limerick Contest was launched. Listeners were asked to submit a last line to the following limerick:

"Be sure and tune in NBC  
For Fibber and Molly - McGee  
They make every Monday  
A National Fun Day  
- - - - -"

Cash prizes were offered for the winning entry each week for four weeks, with an additional twenty-five weekly prizes for the next best entries. Names of first prize winners were announced on the air.

In February 1937 in honor of George Washington's birthday, Fibber launched a "Tell the Truth Contest":

"As a one-time Champion Liar of the World, and the most persistent teller of un-truths, Fibber McGee has decided he should do something about the art of veracity. To that end he is going to conduct a prize contest with an award of some sort or other, to the person who can submit proof of telling the truth under the most trying circumstances, during the balance of 1937."

On May 3, 1937, a Covered Wagon Trailer Contest was launched. Twelve deluxe trailers, one each for twelve weeks, plus 548 cash prizes, were offered to listeners sending in a winning fifty-word testimony: "I like Johnson's Auto Wax and Cleaner because . . ." Each entry had to be accompanied by the top of a package of the sponsor's product. The winner of the first Covered Wagon was Mr. Fred L. Stonely of Saylesville, Rhode Island.

On April 19, 1938, "Molly McGee's Rainbow Garden Offer" was made. Listeners could obtain 10 giant-size gladiola bulbs in shades of yellow, pink, red, orange, and lavender, by sending in proof of purchase of a can of Glo-Coat, or any of Johnson's other wax polishes, plus ten cents.

Through the years, other offers of free premiums were also made. On the program of October 14, 1941, Harlow Wilcox informed listeners that they could obtain a free photograph of the cast of the program with facimile autographs, with the purchase of a pint-size, or larger, container of Johnson Wax. Pictured in the photo were: Jim and Marian Jordan, plus Hal Peary, Harlow



The first in a series of four Fibber McGee games by Milton Bradley Company. Game #4561 was issued in 1936.

79-A



The fourth and final edition of the McGee and Molly game series by Milton Bradley. Game #4768 was called "Fibber McGee and the Wistful Vista Mystery" (1940)

79-B

WorldRadioHistory

**WIN**

**Cash Prizes**

**FIBBER McGEE  
Limerick Contest**

FOR FULL DETAILS READ

**Radio**  
**MIRROR**  
MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER ISSUE

NOW ON SALE

TUNE IN

**Fibber McGee and Molly**

MONDAY NIGHTS • NBC • COAST TO COAST

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

On September 28, 1936 a Limerick Contest was launched. Listeners were asked to submit a last line to the following limerick: "Be sure and tune in NBC, For Fibber and Molly McGee, They make every Monday, A National Fun Day \_\_\_\_\_"

Wilcox, Billy Mills, Bill Thompson, Isabel Randolph and writer, Don Quinn.

On the program of June 3, 1947, two free sets of gold-colored personalized initials for car doors were offered in exchange for a label from Johnson's Car-Nu Wax Polish.

A few other premiums have been reported as having been offered, including a Fibber McGee and Molly Puzzle, a second cast photo, and a black and white lithograph, approximately 16" x 18", showing Fibber and Molly along with Bill Thompson wearing hats associated with each of the characters they portrayed. No dates, or other details are known on the above.

The Milton Bradley Company of Springfield, Massachusetts, manufacturer of games and toys since 1860, developed several Fibber McGee and Molly Games and sold them independently of the program, no announcement of their availability was ever aired. The Jordans, however, did receive minor royalties from the game company.

Listed in the Bradley Games catalogue for 1936-37 was Game #4561 titled: "The Amazing Adventures of FIBBER McGEE (A Hilarious Party Game - Can be played instantly by any group. It is learned at a glance - and any number can play.) Everybody enjoys FIBBER McGEE. It is a game of irresistible laughter from start to finish, with scoring features and counters which add the zest of competitive play - for fun or stakes. The folks who've 'been around' and the 'unsophisticated ladies' find a common ground of hilarious entertainment in FIBBER McGEE. A rollicking game for a crowd - also great fun for just two players, from twelve to ninety years of age. FIBBER McGEE includes a book of 'Amazing Adventures, (275 missing words), scoring cards, and 100 colored counters, in a neat partitioned box. Size: 5-3/8 x 7-3/8.) Price: Fifty cents."

Varying editions of the game were issued for the years 1938, 1939 and 1940. Game #4768 (1940) was titled "The Merry Game of FIBBER McGEE - and the Wistful Vista Mystery." The games were published by special arrangement with the National Broadcasting Co., Inc. and the advertising agency of Needham, Louis and Brorby, Inc.

All of the contests, premiums and games were offered during the Johnson's Wax era of sponsorship - 1935 through 1950. Succeeding sponsors were not inclined to proceed with this type of promotion. The era of radio 'give-aways' had drawn to a close.

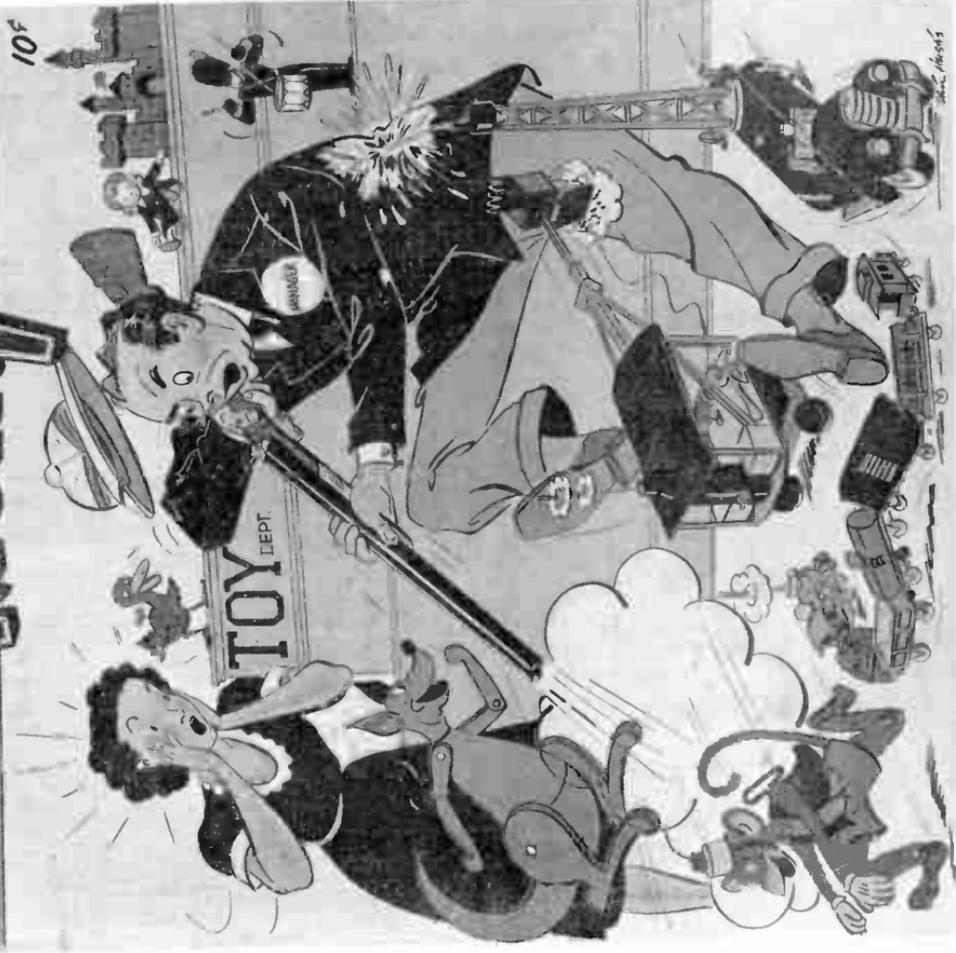
One item which did appear in 1949 was a comic book "Star Parade presents FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY" A-1 No. 25

Radio's favorite pair—

# Fibber McGee and Mollie



10¢



published by Magazine Enterprises (32 pages - price 10 cents) The cover of the comic book announced: "Radio's Favorite Pair - FIBBER MoGEE AND MOLLY" Fibber was shown firing a rifle at a runaway mechanical monkey in a toy department of a store. The heading on the first page of panels stated: "FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY - Radio's Best-Loved Couple."

The madcap adventure begins with a large package from the Watt-Nott Department Store , addressed to '29 Wistful Vista' being delivered to the McGees house, by mistake. Fibber of course gets all riled up and he and Molly go to the store to get the matter straightened out. After causing a rumpus with several vice presidents, they finally get into the office of the store's president, Mr. Watt. Fibber rants and raves, calling the store such McGee-isms as 'a two bit emporium', 'a bric-a-brac barn' and a 'calico castle.' In trying to placate the irate Mr. McGee, the store president appoints him General Manager of the store for the day. In no time flat Fibber finds himself in the middle of a muddle when he mistakes the store detective for a 'pick pocket.' Next McGee takes over as the demonstrator for a 'power-full pressure cooker' with explosive results netting the store a large bill for cleaning customers' splattered clothing. Then he is non-plussed by a huge mechanical multiple-cash register that delivers fifty cents change - in pennies. Bedlam breaks loose when Fibber tries to walk up a 'down' escalator which he insists on calling 'a slow motion stairway.' He sets about altering its gears which soon sends customers sailing through the air in all directions! Then to add to the mayhem, he places a 'Clearance Sale' sign on a counterful of \$50 sets of luggage, reducing them to a dollar.

The McGees then meet up with Teeny in the toy department where Fibber tries to demonstrate a whole barrel full of mechanical monkeys and bouncing bunnies. Teeny is delighted, but the situation gets out of hand and Fibber tries to restore order by firing a rifle at the runaway toys. When Mr. Watt returns to the store and sees the extent of the damage that Fibber has caused, he adds up the cost which comes to a total of \$851 which he charges against McGee's account. When they get back home Fibber trips over the package that is still in the doorway. They open it up to find it full of handcuffs intended for the store detective, just as he arrives on the scene. The final panel shows the detective in hot pursuit of the flabbergasted Fibber, as Molly exclaims her famous - "Heavenly days!"

The strip is well drawn with the cartoon character of Fibber bearing a good likeness to Jim Jordan. The cartoon 'Molly'

# Fibber McGee and Molly

RADIO'S BEST-LOVED COUPLE

...AND LASTLY-HOW ABOUT THIS COLOSSAL "CAN OPENER AND COMBINATION SHOE HORN", MR. MCGEE?

UH-UH, JOHNNY! YOU'LL HAVE TO HIKE ELSEWHERE TO FIND A GENT GULLIBLE ENOUGH TO BUY THAT GOOFY GADGET!



WELL, I GUESS I SENT THAT PEDDLER PEDALING OFF, EH MOLLY?

WHY, THERE'S ALL THE ROOM IN THE WORLD IN THIS CLOSET, MOL---

YOU MEAN ALL THE WORLD IS IN THAT CLOSET ALREADY, MCGEE!

YES, DEARIE-AFTER LINING HIS POCKETS WITH FOLDING STUFF FOR TRASH I'LL HAVE TO LINE OUR FRONT HALL CLOSET WITH!



however is rather nondescript. The artist's signature is illegible and there are no credits given for storyline. The author(s) was obviously well acquainted with the McGee radio program, as all of show's favorite expressions were used and the overstuffed hall closet was also put into play. Fibber also utters dozens of his amusing alliterations. Other than the McGees, the only other Wistful Vista regular appearing in the comic book is Teeny.

## Musical Talent

The merry McGees always had some musical talent waiting in the hall closet to liven up their broadcasts. Their earliest programs were made up of about fifteen minutes of music, with the remainder of the half-hour being devoted to comedy highjinks. As in SMACKOUT, Marian and Jim sang on some of the early McGee shows. On the premiere broadcast, they were heard singing--"Flossie Farmer, the Snake Charmer." On the program for April 30th, they sang "When You're Over Sixty," and for the broadcast of May 14th, they performed "Roll Outta Bed with a Smile." On June 11th they sang, "The Sweetest Story Ever Told," and two weeks later, Marian presented a comedy solo selection, "Stop, You're Tickling!". On July 29th she was joined by Jim for a duet of "She Was the Acrobat's Daughter."

On the broadcast of September 30th, the Jordans' children,

Kay and Jimmy, made a rare guest appearance with their parents and sang a duet of "Piccolino." And on October 14th, Marian soloed again, this time as Teeny . . . she piped up with "Little Yeller Dog." It wasn't until program #60 aired on June 1, 1936 that Marian and Jim sang another duet, a lively rendition of the novelty song, "Wa-Hoo!" It was a very long time until their faithful listeners heard them sing over the airwaves again.

Also heard on the premiere broadcast of the McGee show on April 16, 1935, was the comedy vocal duo, Ronnie and Van, as well as vocalist Kathleen Wells. The studio orchestra was comprised of twenty-six musicians conducted by Rico Marcelli. Featured violinist, Audrey Call, was heard in frequent solos of such standards as: "Star Dust," "Smoke Rings," "In My Solitude," "Play, Fiddle Play," "With All My Heart," and "I'm always Chasing Rainbows." She also played some of her own original compositions such as one entitled, "Streamline." Miss Call married maestro Marcelli in 1937.



Beginning with the program of June 15, 1936 Ted Weems and his orchestra supplied the music for the program. Young vocalist Perry Como and whistler Elmo Tanner were featured. A versatile musician, Weems featured an unique instrument which he called 'the Goofus horn.'

Beginning May 14th, a trio, The Three Kings, were also featured. They were replaced by an octet, the Johnson Merry-men, on August 5th. During the month of July, the singing Bennett Sisters made three appearances on the program. Other musical acts featured during the first year were duo-pianists, LaVeer and Winston, as well as vocalists Joe Bolan, Emery Darcy, Clark Dennis, Bob Hanan, Ronnie Mansfield and Annette King.

When the program moved back to Chicago on May 14th, actress/singer Gale Page replaced Kathleen Wells. Miss Page was billed as "The Waxette," and was featured vocalist, as well as an occasional actress, until she left the program on June 25th. She later entered films and was quite successful, most notably in a series of films at Warner Brothers with the three Lane Sisters. Miss Page was cast as "the fourth Lane Sister." After her departure, contralto Lynn Martin was the featured vocalist through November 4th, at which time another contralto, Kay Donna, took over and continued through January 13, 1936. During the month of October 1935, a quartet known as The Clef Dwellers, were featured.

Ted Weems and his band replaced Marcelli beginning with the program of June 15, 1936. Weems brought with him a new young singer with a very relaxed style, a former barber from Canonsburg, Pennsylvania--Perry Como. Perry's first solo on the show was "My First Thrill." He was sometimes given a few lines to speak. Como held the featured male vocalist spot for most of Weems' tenure on the show. Female vocalist, Marvel Maxwell was also heard. Miss Maxwell later changed her first name to Marilyn and had a successful career in films.

In addition to Como and Miss Maxwell, the personnel of Weems' band included Pete Beilman on trombone (Mr. Weems also played trombone), his brother Art Weems, and Art Winters were featured on trumpets, Red Ingle and Cliff Covert on violins, Country Washburn on bass fiddle, "Rosy" McHargue and Dick Cunliff on saxophones, Jack O'Brien on piano, and Ormond Downes on drums. Parker Gibbs played in the reed section and supplied an occasional vocal. Musicians Ingle, Gibbs, and Washburn also offered occasional comedy vocals.

Weems, a most versatile musician, also featured a most unique instrument which he called "the Goofus horn." The instrument was an odd cross between a bazooka and an Oriental water pipe, and operated along the lines of an accordian. It had a two-octave range and the tonal quality combined the sounds of the accordian and harmonica. The bandleader had located the unusual "Goofus horn" in a pawn shop. Its inventor remains unknown.



Then Clark Dennis was the featured male vocalist on the McGee program from November 1937 through June 1938.



British-born lyric tenor Donald Novis became the show's featured vocalist in September 1938. Novis had a great sense of humor and was sometimes given a few lines to speak.

**87-B**

WorldRadioHistory



Spike Jones was the drummer with the Billy Mills band circa 1938. On the broadcast of May 10, 1938 he was featured in a wild rendition of 'Kiss Me Again' complete with cowbells, slide-whistle and other assorted unusual musical sounds.

On May 3, 1937 the McGee program moved temporarily to the west coast while the Jordans were busy making their film debut at Paramount Pictures. During their ten-week stay in Hollywood, Jimmy Grier's band replaced Weems, who had other commitments in the Chicago area. For the first five weeks of Grier's tenure, his featured vocalist was Joy Hodges, who also had a later film career. During the second five-week period, tenor Tommy Harris was featured. When the program returned to Chicago, Ted Weems and his band resumed their musical duties. They were absent from the show on July 12, 1937, at which time Henry Busse and his band filled in. Perry Como left the McGee show after the broadcast of November 1, 1937, and was replaced by tenor Clark Dennis.

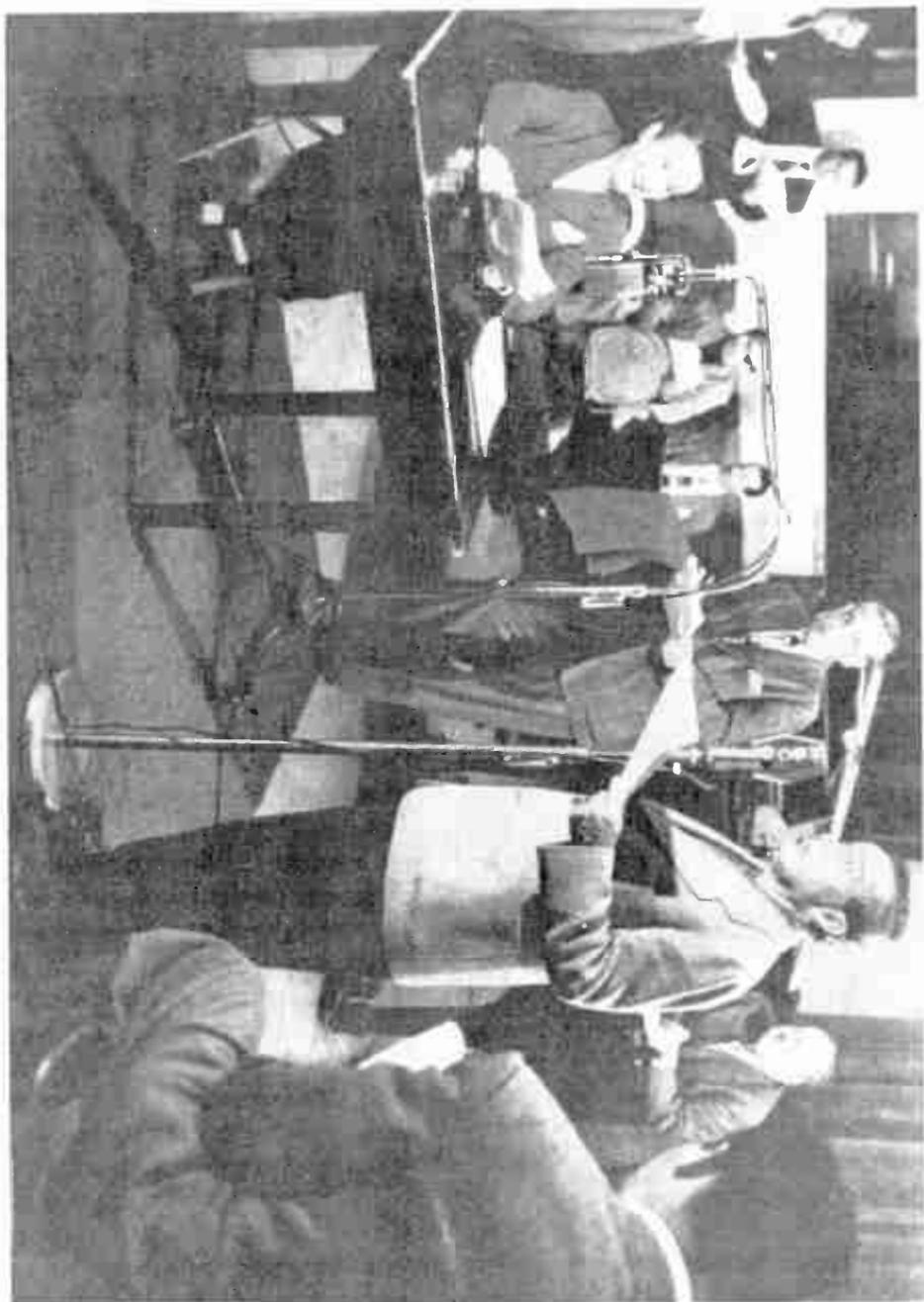
On January 17, 1938, Weems passed the baton over to Billy Mills. The Mills band had a rich, full sound and numbered between eighteen and twenty musicians. There were usually two pianos with Buddy Cole as main pianist. The brass section had three trumpets and two trombones, as well as six saxophone players, who also doubled on clarinets and flutes. There were also string bass, guitar (Perry Botkin), drums, three violins, one viola, and one cello.

Among the members of Mills' talented aggregation was a drummer with multi-talents, one Lindley Armstrong Jones, better known as "Spike." On the broadcast of May 10, 1938, the Mills band featured Spike Jones in a wild rendition of "Kiss Me Again," complete with cowbells, slide-whistle and other assorted unusual musical sounds. Spike had a field day with the arrangement. The number was repeated on the program of June 25, 1940 in an effort to impress maestro Meredith Willson, who was about to take over the time slot for the summer months while the McGee show went on vacation. Jones continued to work with the Mills band even after he had formed his own "City Slickers" troupe.

On September 6, 1938, tenor Donald Novis replaced Clark Dennis. Novis was frequently given a few lines to speak and continued on the program through November 7, 1939. When he left to go on a concert tour, a Canadian tenor, Jimmy Shields, was signed on as male vocalist beginning November 14th and was heard regularly through January 30, 1940.

A musical group known as The Four Notes, began a long run on the show starting November 29, 1938, and were heard through 1939. The quartet was comprised of Lee Gillette, Lee Gotch, James Krumenacher, and pretty Marjorie Whitney.

February 6, 1940 was an important date for the McGee program, for it was on that historic date that the King's Men joined the cast.



Rehearsal shot: Marian at her table, announcer Harlow Wilcox, Fibber at center mike, Arthur Q. Bryan in background and producer Frank Pittman with back to camera.

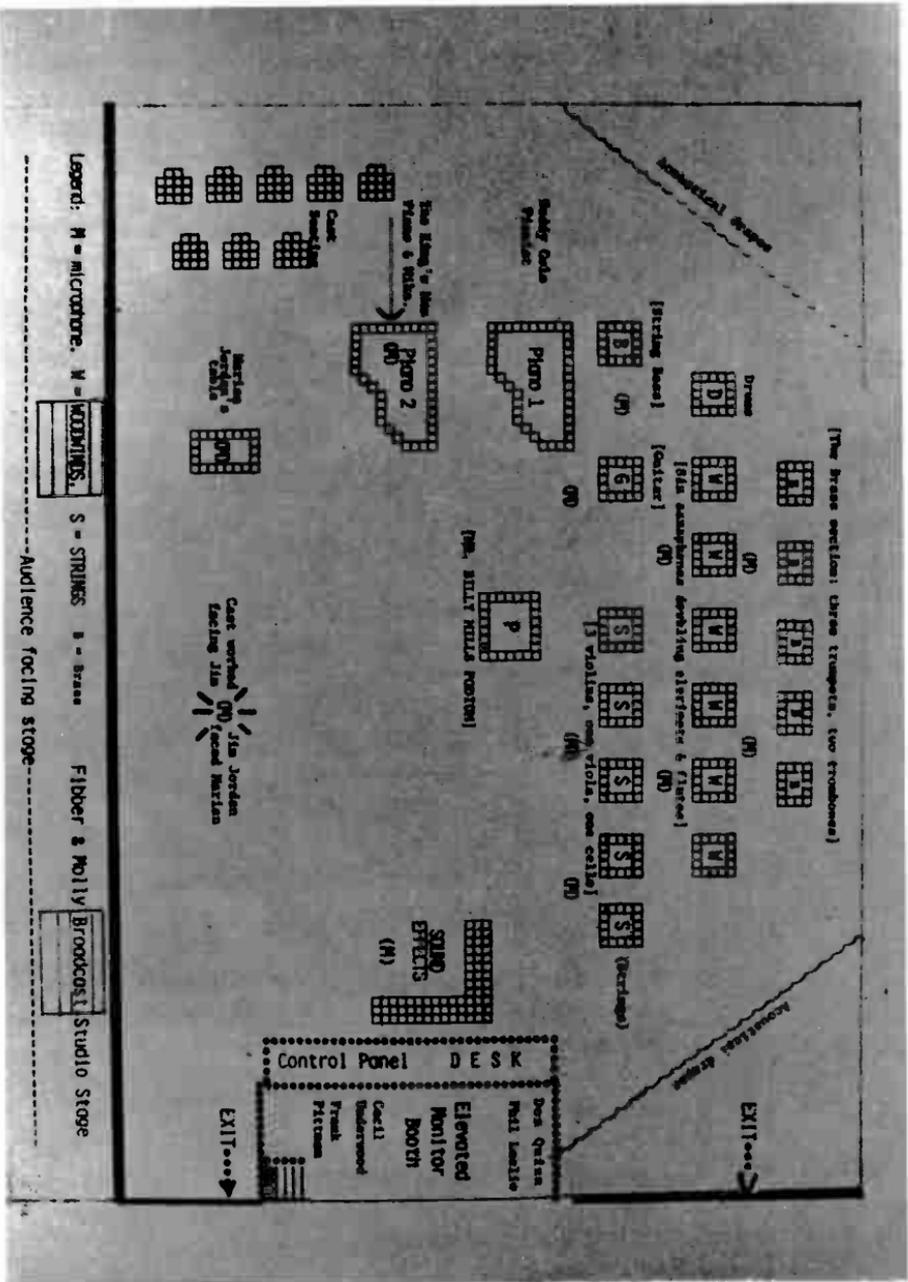
The quartet was headed by arranger/composer and bass singer, Ken Darby. Bud Linn sang top tenor, Jon Dodson second tenor, and Rad Robison baritone. The group was first heard joining the Mills band for the opening number, "Holy Smoke, Can't You Take a Joke?". Later in the show they returned to the microphone for a novelty rendition of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." The arrangement was by Ken Darby and was typical of the unique arrangements with special lyrics for which the group became famous. Some of the lyrics of that first specialty number ran:

"With a salesman here, and a salesman there,  
HARLOW WILCOX everywhere!"

Originally signed for a one-time guest appearance, the versatile foursome was ideally suited to the McGee show and remained for thirteen consecutive years, never failing to delight listeners with their clever arrangements and musical virtuosity. After they became regulars on the show, the King's Men were usually the only featured vocalists. However, on September 30, 1941, popular songstress "liltin'" Martha Tilton, made a guest appearance and returned for twelve more shows through December 23rd.

In describing the stage positions assigned to cast members during broadcasts, Mr. Darby recalled:

*KEN DARBY: "Our microphone was centered over the music rack on Piano #2. I sat at the piano, sang bass, and accompanied; Rad Robinson sang over my left shoulder, Jon Dodson was close behind me, and Bud Linn was at my right. Marian always sat at a little table with her script with a gooseneck microphone over the middle of the table. On some of "Teeny's" work, she moved in close to the microphone. When waiting our turn to go on, we sat in chairs behind Marian's table, and our laughter was always picked up on her microphone. When we sang, "Twas the Night Before Christmas" with Marian, she always remained at her table and used the table mike. . . ."*



Layout for NBC Hollywood Studio indicating cast positions. The center stage microphone was Jim's 'spot' enabling him to face Marian seated at her table with 'goose neck' microphone. (1939).

## Prosperity

The December 15, 1936 edition of Broadcasting Magazine contained a statement concerning the S.C. Johnson Company, sponsors of the McGee program:

"Dealers everywhere report sales increases of 30 to 50% on Johnson's polishes, and an impartial 'pantry-shelf survey' in a city of 150,000 shows an increase of nearly 20% for wax in 1936 over 1935. In the same survey, Johnson's auto cleaner and auto wax products were found in twice as many homes as in 1935. A big reason for these increases is Johnson's radio program on NBC - FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY."

The program's success so pleased the sponsor that the Jordans were given a new contract, upping their salary to \$2,650 per program. Along with AMOS 'N ANDY and LUM AND ABNER, they ranked among the best paid performers airing from Chicago.

Displaying unquestioned confidence in the program, on April 12, 1937 the network switched time schedule and placed it in a new time slot on Monday nights, pitting it against the stiffest of all possible air competition, the CBS blockbuster LUX RADIO THEATRE hosted by Cecil B. DeMille.

In the fall of 1937, the Johnson Company launched a clever advertising campaign featuring the popular stars in full-color half-page advertisements in many leading newspapers around the country. This special series of ads were run in the form of comic-strips depicting the capricious capers of McGee and his missus.

The program of Monday, March 7, 1938, brought an end to the era of the repeat broadcasts which they had been making each week. Up until that time, each show was aired twice on the same night. The first broadcast reached about 90% of their audience in the midwest and on the east coast. The repeat broadcast made several hours later was beamed to the remaining 10% on the west coast, in the Pacific Time Zone. Beginning Tuesday, March 15th, the single broadcast each week was carried over the NBC Red Network coast-to-coast at 8:30 p.m. (CST). For the first time, millions of Americans were able to tune in Wistful Vista as one audience.

In May of 1938 when Radio Guide Magazine announced the results of its annual "Star of Stars" Poll, Marian and Jim were in third place, trailing behind Jack Benny and Edgar Bergen, but



■ Welcome back radio's grand comedy team! Fibber and Molly celebrate twenty-three years of a happy marriage and business partnership this winter. Molly gets her anniversary present this summer—in the form of a beautifully equipped trailer, in which they toured the West Coast of California. What more could Molly ask for now that her daughter has entered college and her son has grown up? This is the McGees' sixth year with the same sponsor on Tuesday nights at 9:30, over the NBC-Red.

A 1941 portrait of the Jordans appeared in Radio Mirror Magazine fall of 1941.

leading such other air favorites as Fred Allen, Eddie Cantor and Burns and Allen.

Many writers have tried to sum up the essence of the characters of Fibber and Molly in a few lines. None succeeded better than an anonymous writer for Newsweek Magazine, who summed them up this way in the issue for October 16, 1972:

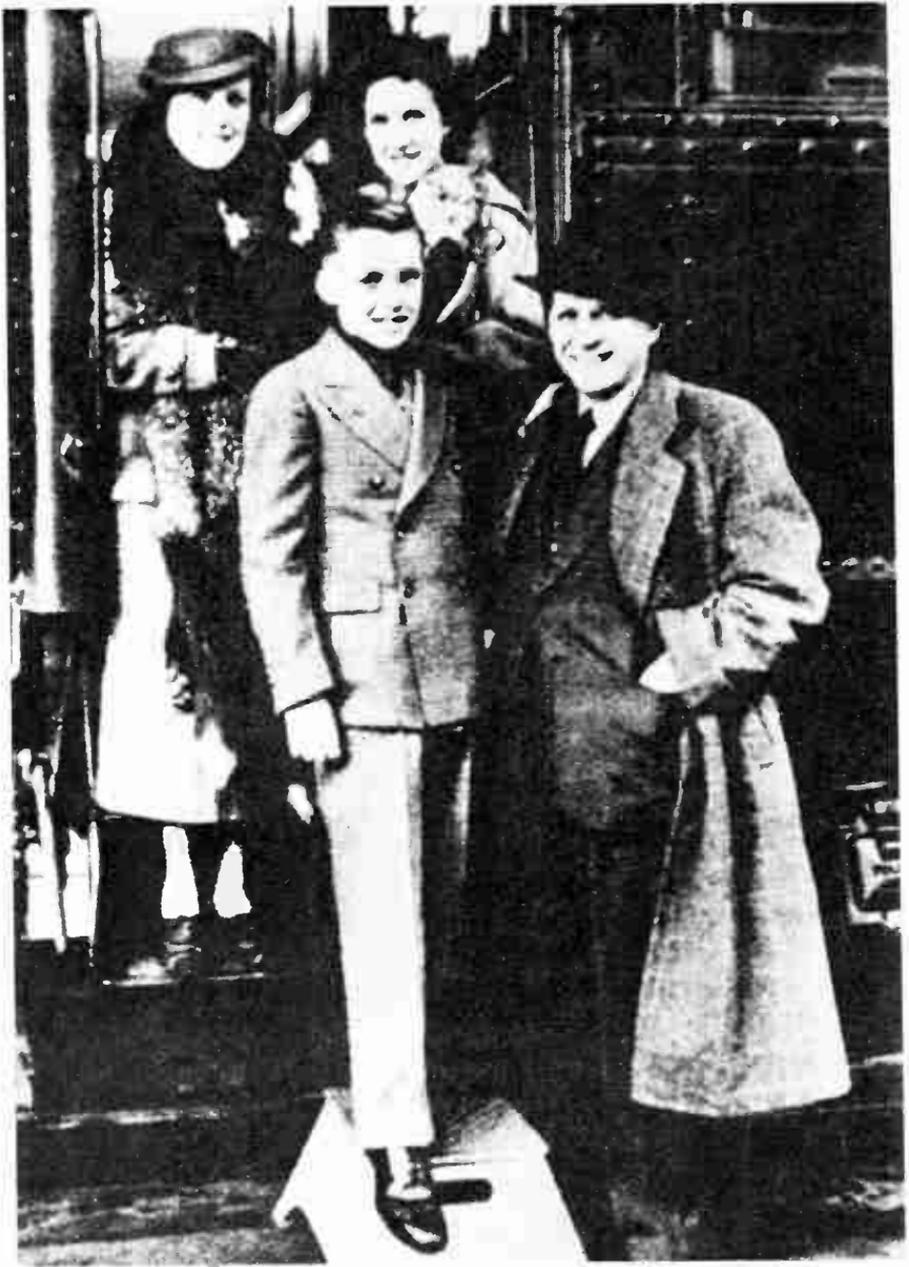
NEWSWEEK: "He lived in an imaginary house at 79 Wistful Vista, where the closet was filled with more junk than a scrap dealer's front yard. He was incurably lazy and a compulsive liar, but although he was always concocting some scheme to get out of work, he was invariably caught by his wife, who would exclaim: "Tain't funny, McGee!" And at that precise moment, 48 million Americans sitting around their radios would break into uproarious laughter. McGee was Fibber and his lovable wife was Molly, and together they were one of the hottest regularly scheduled shows on radio."

The very happily married Jordans shared a philosophy about life and work. At the conclusion of each broadcast they would silently clasp hands.

JIM JORDAN: *"Radio made us homebodies. When you're in radio the best things in life are yours for the choosing. You can work out a normal, regular life and fill it with exactly the things you want, and still have time to raise a family, and enjoy them, too! In Hollywood, it seems as if two people no sooner get married, especially if they are at all well-known, than the studios separate them."*

To which Marian added:

MARIAN JORDAN: *"We won't let them separate us. They've tried plenty of times, but neither one of us ever wanted to do a 'single,' or try to work with anyone else. We've always been a team. We've always worked together and always will. That's our strength and our stock in trade. We've refused some fine-sounding offers in order to stick together."*



The Jordan family, Marian, daughter Kathryn (Kay), Jim, Jr., and Mr. Jim Jordan boarding the train for Hollywood where 'Fibber and Molly' were about to make their film debut for Paramount Pictures. (April 1937).

### "This Way Please"

It was inevitable that Hollywood would beckon to radio's fastest rising comedy team. The offer came from Paramount Pictures and the deal was set by the Artists Bureau of NBC. The Jordans were signed to make their film debut doing a few featured bits in the romantic comedy, THIS WAY PLEASE. The film also marked the screen debut of another radio personality, Mary Livingston of the Jack Benny program.

Don Quinn joined them on their trip to the west coast to write the special material for their film debut. Beginning May 3, 1937, the weekly radio broadcasts were aired from the studios of KFI in Hollywood. Many west coast radio personalities, as well as movie celebrities, stopped by the NBC studios to attend a broadcast.

THIS WAY PLEASE had its world premiere at the Los Angeles Paramount Theatre on October 7, 1937. Throughout the film, Jim and Marian appeared in rustic costumes depicting the McGees as tourists from a small country town. The picturesque pair arrived in Tinsel Town in a beat-up trailer bearing a crudely lettered sign which read: "HOLLYWOOD OR BUST!" Jim was decked out in an ill-fitting suit with horn-rimmed spectacles. To add to his bumbling bumpkin type characterization, he took a couple of prat falls for the movie cameras. One fall sent him out of the window of a tall building and had him landing in a convenient awning. In addition, he also tumbled off a theatre stage into the orchestra pit. Molly's antics were more subdued.

Fibber and Molly were not directly involved in the film's rather skimpy plot, which concerned a new usherette (Betty Grable) at a lavish Hollywood movie palace, who develops an overwhelming crush on a visiting movie star (Charles Buddy Rogers). Mary Livingston proved herself to be more than capable with wise-cracks and comedy timing. Fibber and Molly appeared in a few brief vignettes. The best routine found Marian displaying her versatility as an actress, using both her Grandma Wheedledeck and Teeny character voices. Paramount's make-up department provided her with a blonde curly wig and a little girl's costume, and she was photographed in costume for some publicity shots. Evidentially



WorldRadioHistory

Pretty and shy ten year old Marian Driscoll with her older sister Ellen ('Nell') beside their home in the 'Dutch Hill' neighborhood of Peoria's south side.

there were some original plans of having her appear as "Teeny" in the film, but such was not the case. However, she did manage an attractive appearance despite some unflattering costumes. The familiar couple from *Wistful Vista* looked much as their many radio fans might have expected them to look. The Jordans seemed to be "naturals" for the motion picture medium. Audience reaction was most favorable. Paramount was pleased with the public response and offered the Jordans a contract calling for an additional three films. The next film was tentatively titled "*Summer Boarders*," but it was never made.

The Jordans' stay in Hollywood had lasted a little longer than had been expected. While they were on the west coast, they began their new fifty-two week contract with NBC and returned to Chicago for the broadcast of July 12th.

### Marian's Lengthy Illness

A motion picture career was not in the cards--at least not at the time. When *THIS WAY PLEASE* had its Chicago premiere at the Garrick Theater on November 18th, Marian was too ill to attend.

The price of success nearly always comes high. When it looked as though their radio show was a real success, many added demands and responsibilities were placed on Marian and Jim's shoulders. The success was too new to insure permanence, so it had to be carefully sustained every day through personal appearances and carefully planned publicity. Week after week, after finishing their broadcast, Marian and Jim would dash for a cab or train, enroute to some other engagement. Then the next week's show would have to be carefully whipped into shape. There was a report that the pair would also branch out into daytime broadcasting, as well. If there was a spare moment in this hectic routine, there were always reporters and photographers waiting for interviews, and a million and one other little details to be taken care of. Through all of this, Jim and Marian always gave considerable time and attention to their children and never shirked any of their family responsibilities.

The added chore of film-making, combined with an already heavy work load, made very taxing demands on the Jordans' time and talents. It also drained Marian's strength and had a serious effect on her health, which had been fragile for some time. By September of 1937, she was greatly concerned about her waning strength and visited the family physician. One look at Marian and



Dolores Gillen was an actress who utilized her 'baby voice' to play many child roles on radio. During Marian Jordan's long absence from the show when both 'Molly' and 'Teeny' were missing, Miss Gillen was featured in a number of baby-voiced roles.

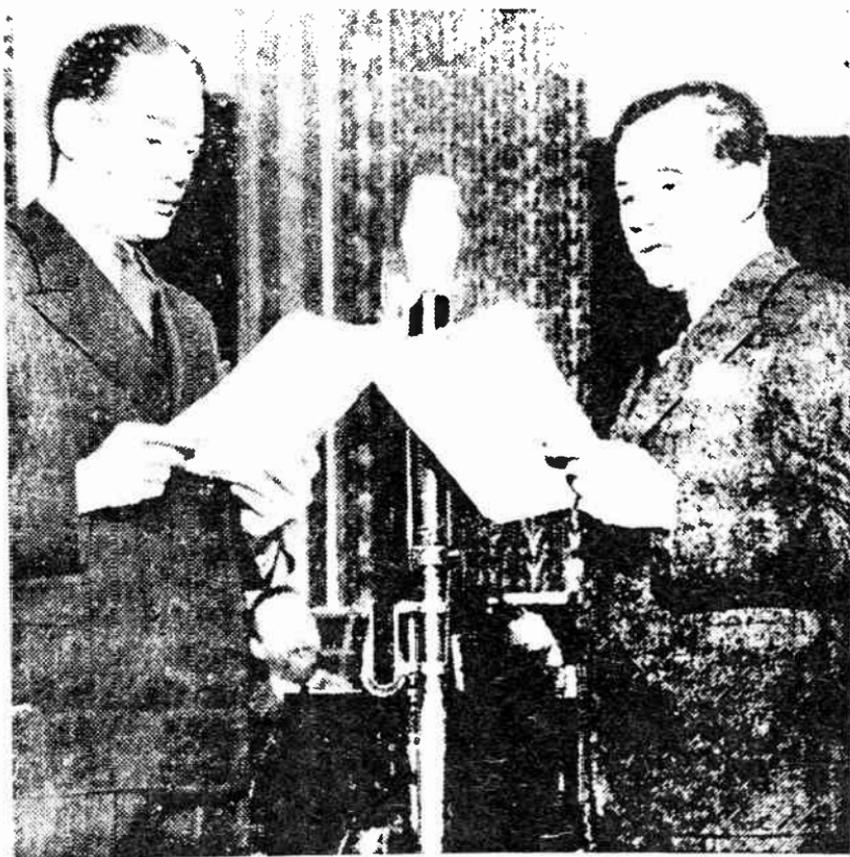
complete bed-rest at a sanitarium, between broadcasts, was ordered. All of her other activities were curtailed. Even with the recommended bed rest, Marian's illness grew worse and finally forced her off the air altogether. The doctor explained to Jim that his wife's condition was critical, and if she was to get well, she must remain free from all worry. Jim realized she was greatly concerned about missing any of their broadcasts. He further realized that he had to put her mind at ease by being funnier on the air, working solo, than he had ever been before.

During the days that followed, he worked relentlessly with his writers and cast. The next broadcast, minus Marian, had to be one of his best--for Marian's sake. It was one of the worst times of Jim's life, but mercifully, the days and nights slipped by. More than the continued success of the program was at stake, it was vital for the return of Marian's health.

The night of the broadcast finally arrived. Jim found himself standing alone at the microphone, nervously clutching his script. A thousand thoughts hurried through his troubled mind. . . . The orchestra began to play the introduction. . . . Harlow Wilcox finished the opening commercial--and stepped aside. It was now up to him. Calling upon every fibre of his being to deliver as it had never done before, Jim worked his way carefully through the script. The studio audience obviously missed Marian's presence but gave their hearty approval with the blessed reassuring sound of laughter.

At the close of the show, with a deep sigh of relief, and a large lump in his throat, Jim leaned close to the microphone and whispered--"Goodnight, Molly." The broadcast had been one of his best.

Word of Marian's illness was kept secret. Listeners at home began to wonder about her absence and Jim's very touching closing message to her. On the program of December 6th he closed the show with "Hurry back, Molly," and on December 13th, "How soon, Molly?" Listeners sensed the love and concern contained in those short messages. However, the Federal Communications (FCC) became more than a little concerned over Jim's personal messages being spoken over the air. Broadcasting rules dictated that there be no "point to point communication" on any regularly scheduled program. Regretfully, the network requested Jim to drop the short good night messages to Marian. There was no "Goodnight, Molly" spoken on the broadcast of Monday, January 31, 1938, nor for several weeks thereafter. Evidentially there were some second thoughts all the way around, even on the part of the FCC, for the broadcast of March 15th concluded, once again, with



### SILLY WATSON "HELPS" FIBBER.

*One of radio's funniest teams—"Silly Watson" (Hugh Studebaker) and Fibber McGee (Jim Jordan). In the above candid snapshot, "Sil," at the left, is reading his lines. Fibber awaits a cue.*

Jim's touching--"Goodnight, Molly."

When it became apparent that Marian's illness would necessitate a long convalescence period, the film contract with Paramount Pictures was cancelled. NBC continued the weekly broadcasts, but with a slight variation of program title, the show was referred to as "FIBBER MCGEE AND COMPANY! Molly's absence was covered by explaining that she had gone to visit her Aunt Sarah Driscoll.

During Molly's absence, Fibber's slow-talking unpaid "house boy," Silly Watson, became his side-kick and was involved in much of the weekly comedy highjinks. "Silly" was short for Silvus Leviticus Dueteronomy Watson. The character had been heard for the first time on the broadcast of September 2, 1935, at which time it was noted that he had a brother named Considerable, or "Sid," for short. Silly often spoke in his slow Southern drawl about his girlfriend, Rosebud Jackson. During the time period when the McGee program occupied a Monday night slot, announcer Wilcox sometimes introduced Silly Watson as "Fibber's Monday-Man Friday." The role was played by the very versatile actor, Hugh Studebaker.

For the first time in many years, Jim began to accept some solo air work, as well. He made his dramatic debut on The First Nighter program of January 21, 1938, sharing the microphone with Barbara Luddy and Les Tremayne. He played the role of "A.H. Harris," a hard-boiled theatrical agent in a playlet entitled, "Four-Door Blinky." One June 28th he made a solo return visit to RCA's Magic Key program. In addition, he and other Wistful Vista regulars made personal appearances at benefits for the Lions Club in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and for The Knights of Pythias in Cincinnati, Ohio. On Sunday, December 18, 1938, "Fibber McGee and Company" made a personal appearance at the Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum in Omaha, Nebraska. Marian's absence was deeply felt by Jim and the cast that included Hal Peary, Isabel Randolph, Betty Winkler, Hugh Studebaker, and Dolores Gillen. They tried valiantly to carry on without her.

Finally, on June 28th, Marian was able to make a brief appearance on the McGee program before it took a break for its first summer vacation. She spoke briefly, as both Molly and Teeny, and told anxious listeners that she would be back on the show when it returned for the fall season in September.

The summer replacement program was a continuing drama, "Attorney-At-Law," featuring Jim Ameche, Henry Hunter, Betty Winkler, Brett Morrison, and Phil Lord.

The month of July 1938, brought added sadness to Jim. Don



Billy Mills was a music maestro and gourmet chef. Conducted the band on the McGee program 1938/53. A gifted arranger and composer, Mills' many compositions include 'Wing to Wing' which was used as a theme on the McGee show for many years.

Quinn and his wife were enroute to their newly-built home in Del Monte, California, when she was killed in an auto accident. At the funeral, Jim sang in public for the first time in several years. He offered a soulful rendition of "Lead Kindly Light." Because he feared his voice might break with emotion, he had asked NBC staff tenor, Gwynfi Jones, to stand at his side and take over should he be unable to continue.

The McGee program returned to the air on September 6th with a show about hundreds of autograph seekers awaiting the McGee's return. However, Marian was not well enough to resume her role as Molly, and in her absence, Fibber was forced to lay aside his cigar and to leave the comfort of his easy chair, and venture out into the cruel work-a-day world. On future programs, the well-intended but ill-equipped McGee tried his bumbling hand at a long list of occupations including: detective, football coach, life-guard, Justice of the Peace, efficiency expert in a baby carriage factory, police reporter, real estate agent, Quiz Master of the show--"So You Think You're Smart, Eh?," weather-forecaster; as well as manager of a hamburger stand, travel bureau, riding academy, the Giltmore Hotel and the Bijou Theater!

On the program of November 29, 1937, he opened "McGee's College of Santa-Clausing," offering courses in commercial "Kringling" for Department Store Santas. At other times, he attempted to work as an assistant fireman and substitute Mayor. But, like time, his jobs were all "fleeting," and lasted no longer than the duration of the broadcast on which they occurred.

## Cast Changes

While Molly was away, the program underwent several important cast changes. Ted Weems and his band left the show on January 10, 1938, and the baton was passed along to Billy Mills. Mills, a native of Flint, Michigan, had been a theater pianist and church organist in his hometown. During World War I, he served as bandmaster for the U.S. Artillery. Following his discharge from military service, he began to do orchestrations for the Isham Jones band and eventually formed his own orchestra. Mills joined the staff of CBS in Chicago in 1932 as arranger and went on to become the network's general music supervisor. He conducted the orchestra on programs such as: "Myrt and Marge" (1934/1936), "The Flying Red Horse Tavern" show (1936), and "The Gold Medal Hour" (1936/37). He was a gifted arranger and composer



Bernardine Flynn was heard on the program many times during the 1936 season. She remained in Chicago when the show moved to the west coast. Miss Flynn gained great fame as half of the famous radio team "the couple in the little house, half-way up in the next block- VIC AND SADE."

and supplied some of the original theme music heard on the McGee program, including one of the most familiar themes-"Wing to Wing."

For some time, Jim Jordan had been planning to move the show to the west coast in hopes that the warmer climate would benefit Marian's health. The last regular McGee broadcast from Chicago was aired on Tuesday, January 24, 1939. The following week, the program was heard from NBC in Hollywood. Cast regulars Thompson, Peary, Randolph, Wilcox, along with Billy Mills and his band, and the singing "Four Notes," all made the move to the west coast.

Hugh Studebaker, who had been a long-time regular member of the Chicago cast as Silly Watson, did not go along. He had also been heard in a variety of other roles on the show including Fibber's dramatic coach, "Barrymel Lionmore." Studebaker was a most versatile and accomplished actor and was very active in many of the soap operas and dramatic shows in the Windy City. He was heard on such sudsy sagas as "The Romance of Helen Trent," "Backstage Wife," "The Story of Mary Marlin," and "The Road of Life." One of his most notable roles was kindly "Dr. Bob Graham" in the long-running soap opera, "Bachelor's Children." Another of Studebaker's air accomplishments was a broadcast of "Cyrano De Bergerac," in French. The actor did not speak the language, but learned it phonetically for the occasion. He also portrayed Scrooge in several broadcasts of Dickens', "A Christmas Carol," and was frequently cast on the air as "Abraham Lincoln." He was also a fine musician. Studebaker's role as Silly Watson on the McGee program was quite a departure from his usual dramatic assignments, and proof of his great versatility.

Bernadine Flynn was another frequent cast member who stayed behind in Chicago. Miss Flynn had been on the program many times during the 1936 season, and was heard in a great variety of roles. She later gained fame as half of the famous radio team--"the couple in the little house half-way up in the next block--VIC AND SADE."

Another cast regular, Betty Winkler, also remained in Chicago, where she was active on such serials as 'Girl Alone,' "Dan Harding's Wife," "Lights Out," Lone Journey," and "Don Winslow of the Navy." She had been heard in various roles on the McGee show, playing a Southern belle named "Daisy," as well as "Dimples LaRue," the frequently discussed "Miss Fiditch," as well as a scatter-brained secretary named, "Flossie." In real life, Miss Winkler was far from being scatter-brained. Quite to the contrary, after her retirement from the acting profession, she became very



During Marian Jordan's long illness ZaSu Pitts made a number of guest appearances on the McGee program. She is best remembered for her many zany movie roles with her quavering voice and fluttering hands. Miss Pitts' other radio work includes a role on the serial 'Big Sister' and featured role with Lum and Abner.

active in the field of psychiatry, worked as a therapist, and authored several books on the subject.

The issue of Radio Guide Magazine for the week ending January 28, 1939, featured a gag photograph of Jim Jordan on its cover. All decked out as Fibber McGee, the whimsical windbag from the Windy City, he was seen standing near a road sign which read: "HOLLYWOOD--2,500 MILES." Nearby was his suitcase with large letters spelling out "FIBBER MCGEE." Obviously anxious to soak up the good old California sunshine, the talkative traveler toted various recreational gear, including tennis rackets, golf clubs, fishing pole, binoculars, and a whole jug full of "Sun Tan Lotion"!

After the move to the west coast, many of the finest character actors in radio were heard in unbilled appearances on the McGee program. Such notable performers as Mel Blanc, Jim Backus, Verna Felton, Frank Nelson, Elvia Allman, Ken Christy, Rolfe Sedan, Walter Tetley, and versatile dialectician Sara Berner, as well as many others.

Screen star Zasu Pitts made a guest appearance on the broadcast of October 4, 1938 from Chicago. Later, she also made several appearances from Hollywood. On February 7, 1939, she was heard as a traveling saleslady accompanied by a bratty son, played by Walter Tetley (famous for his role of "LeRoy" on the Great Gildersleeve show). On February 21st, she returned as a man-hungry chambermaid, and on March 7th, she played a woebegone spinster who applied at Fibber's hamburger stand for the job as cashier, in order to meet some eligible gentlemen. On March 21st, Miss Pitts was heard as a doctor's assistant and made one final appearance on April 11th. The reknown actress gained motion picture fame in roles ranging from a highly dramatic performance in "Greed," to the wife of W.C. Fields in Paramount Pictures' "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," in 1934. She was also quite active in radio, and at one time, had a running role on the soap opera, "Big Sister." Miss Pitts was also heard frequently with Lum and Abner on their half-hour radio series.



Recovered from her long illness, Marian Jordan arrives at the Los Angeles International Airport accompanied by her son, Jim.

## Molly Returns

Marian Jordan returned to the air in her famous role as "Molly McGee" on April 18, 1939. Her reunion with all of the Wistful Vista citizenry was touchingly described in the July 1939 edition of Radio Mirror Magazine:

"There wasn't a dry eye in the studio the night Molly returned to the Fibber McGee program after an absence that began in the fall of 1937. Molly herself burst into tears when she entered the studio and saw what Fibber, the rest of the cast and many of her fans had done to welcome her. They'd banked the walls of the NBC studio high with a mass of flowers. Letters and telegrams of congratulations filled a table at the side of the room ... Molly looks fine, although she is still a little weak. You don't get over a long illness like hers in a hurry. However, her doctors say she can stand the strain of broadcasting, at least until the program goes off the air for vacation in June.

Incidentally, Molly's return was an occasion for rejoicing by an office boy in her sponsor's factory. Even though he's never seen her and lives two thousand miles from Hollywood, he suggested that the homecoming program be written around a "budget theme" and reaped a hundred dollar bonus for his idea."

With Marian's return, the show hit full stride. It ranked Number Four in the Radio Guide Magazine Popularity Poll for 1939 (with Jack Benny holding the Number One spot). On April 4th, twenty-seven stations of the Canadian Broadcasting System joined with the NBC network to bring Fibber McGee and Molly to listeners throughout Canada and the United States.

Jim continued to be greatly concerned for Marion's fragile health, and felt it would be much better for her to live in the warm valley area where there was plenty of health-restoring sunshine. One day in May he took her for a drive through the famous Pass into the San Fernando Valley, just over the hills from Hollywood. Entering Encino, he turned down Rancho Street and drove slowly past a pretty white Monterey-type house, set in a beautiful garden. Marion became excited as soon as she saw the house. "Look, Jim. There's our dream house - come to life!"

With tears of joy in his eyes, Jim told her that he had discovered the spot only the day before, that it was for sale, and that he had especially brought her out to see it. It was a case of love at first sight, and within a few days the house was theirs.

Every room on the first floor opened out onto a wide terrace that extended the entire length of the house in the back. Upstairs,



Four radio personalities from Peoria - Charles Correll (Andy of Amos 'n Andy), announcer Ken Carpenter, Marion and Jim appear to be singing "I Wish I Was in Peoria" at the NBC microphone, August, 1937.

Marion's bedroom, in soft shades of peach and green, opened onto the front balcony, as did all of the other bedrooms. The set-up was ideal for plenty of outdoor living in the sunshine.

In the garden was a huge oak tree, the largest in the valley. Local legend was that long ago, Indians had traveled many miles to lean against the tree's broad trunk, believing that they would absorb some of its mighty strength. Jim hoped, too, that the tree would somehow help restore Marion's strength. Under its spreading branches, handyman Jim built a barbecue pit. In the rear of the house, just over a little bridge, was a smaller house, complete with a large game room, a corner fireplace, and a miniature kitchen. There was also a fully equipped workshop for Jim.

There was nearly three acres of land with fruit and nut trees, berries and grapes. It was the perfect spot for contentment and peace. And to make it even more ideal, it was located within nine miles of the NBC studios in Hollywood.

As Marian's health improved, she was able to increase her activities. On May 28th, she and Jim donated their services to the Gulf Screen Guild program and were heard in a variety program in which they were anxious to meet the other guest stars Nelson Eddy, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Ann Sheridan. Roland Young served as the program's host and the Oscar Bradley orchestra supplied the music. The Music Maids sang Fibber's favorite song, "Red Wing."

As their own show continued to gain in popularity, many awards began to roll in. The Jordans remained unaffected by the added fame and honors being bestowed upon them and remained down-to-earth home-loving folks, as witness this letter written by Marian to Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Studebaker on June 1, 1939:

"Dear Chici and Hugh:

We want to thank you for your lovely letter which we're ashamed we didn't answer before this. But we've been moving into a house out here and have been up to our ears in work, but it's fun.

Did you see Harlow last week when he was in Chicago? Bill Simmons sent ten pounds of ribs back with him, so they all came out to our house after the show Tuesday - and did we eat them - and were they good! We had a lot of fun. Thompson had us all in stitches. Harlow wanted each of us to autograph a rib to send back to Bill.

We bought a house out here and we love it. The place has every kind of fruit you can name on it, and



Backstage at a broadcast: Jim Jordan, Mrs. Hal Peary, Billy Mills, Marian Jordan and Cecil Underwood. (January, 1942).

we're putting in a pool. By that, you'll think we've gone 'Hollywood,' but we're doing it to keep our kids at home more than anything else, as the house is quite far out and we think there isn't much for them to do. Jim is fifteen and Kathryn eighteen, and at that age they are 'rarin' to go.'

We hope Hugh is doing well in Chicago. Heard an old recording the other day and 'Silly Watson' sounded great on it. The show is going well and is second in the Crosley Poll which means a lot. We are looking forward to nine weeks off this summer. Don't know what we'll do as we hate to leave our place, and besides, we've spent so darned much on it that we may just go out and buy a 'Hires Root Beer' with four straws - and call it 'vacation'.

Would love to hear from you guys anytime you can find the urge to write.

Love,  
Marian and Jim"

Several members of the McGee show cast and crew settled in Encino, California and were a closely knit group. Writer Quinn lived near the Jordans, as did Hal Peary and several other members of the cast. Gale Gordon eventually purchased Don Quinn's home on Rancho Road. Although the group did not socialize a great deal, there was a binding camaraderie among them that still exists among the surviving members today.

When the program left the air for a summer vacation after the broadcast of June 20, 1939, the Jordans treated their cast and crew to a "Home-Grown Lunch Party" by serving food that had been grown on their San Fernando Valley farm.

The summer replacement show in 1939 was headed by British pianist and humorist, Alec Templeton. The McGee show returned to the air on September 5th and the first program of the new season centered around a "fish fry".

On December 21st, Marian and Jim were heard on a special broadcast, CURTAIN CALLS OF 1939. That year they also took part in Hollywood's annual Santa Claus Lane Parade. During the war years, the parades were discontinued, but resumed in 1945. In all, the Jordans participated in eleven of the Santa Claus Parades and rode on their last Wistful Vista float in the parade held in November of 1952.



Caricatures of Fibber and Molly from a set of four-color mini-posters of NBC radio stars (1947).

# CITIZENS OF WISTFUL VISTA

## Meet the McGees

During 1942, the producers of the McGee program conducted a national survey to determine "where" listeners thought Wistful Vista was located. The answer was overwhelmingly the same: "Right down the street".

JIM JORDAN: *"You know what Wistful Vista means?... a sad view. Don Quinn and Bruce Kamman and all of us cooked that one up. The town, the street, everything was called Wistful Vista. And the number '79' - one night Don sat at his typewriter - closed his eyes and pecked at two numbers and that was it - Number 79 Wistful Vista! And do you know that all of the important buildings in Wistful Vista were all located at the same address - the corner of 14th and Oak? That was one of Don's favorite running gags. It never caught on big, but he continued to use it throughout his time with us."*

Whimsical Wistful Vista was once described as being: "Founded in 1892. Population: 1,000. Elevation: 700 feet. Elm Street is lined with birch trees, and Birch Street, lined with elms."

The fictional town also had its own newspaper, The Wistful Vista Gazette, and its own radio station--WVIS. The favorite recreation area during all four seasons of the year was Dugan's Lake. Fibber and Molly sometimes went canoeing there, and its peaceful, if somewhat murky waters, held the biggest, meanest and most evasive bass alive--"Ole Muley," who always managed to get away with the bait until Fibber finally landed him on the program of May 7, 1946. But, alas, one day out of season! A typical turn of revolting events.

The show used many "running gags", such as the length of time it took Fibber to finish reading the book, Anthony Adverse, and how much he owed the library for the book being so long overdue. There was a bothersome window shade in the McGee living room that kept flying up, and their laundry was always several days late in being returned. Accident-prone McGee frequently tore the cover of the pool table at the Elks Club during demonstrations of his pool-shooting prowess. The most popular part of his entire anatomy was his clavical, which he referred to frequently in



A still from the Paramount film **THIS WAY PLEASE**. Molly grimaces as Fibber enjoys the company of the pretty chorus girls. (1937).

expressions such as "Oh, my aching clavical. . . ." On one broadcast, someone mis-read the line: "Throw out the dragnet," as "Drag out the throw net," and that, too, became a running gag.

Fibber had a fine fondness for both pot roast and root beer. In fact, root beer drew repeated mentioning, and it was, by far, his favorite form of libation. Even during the cold winter months, he would ask Molly to fetch some "hot buttered root beer". This was undoubtedly another example of writer Quinn's "inside jokes." For Jim Jordan was a shrewd businessman and had made many diversified business investments, one of which was the Kansas City bottling plant for Hires Root Beer.

Early in 1938, Jim and his brother Byron (Mickey), acquired the rights to distribute Hires Root Beer over a forty-two county area. The bottling plant was located at 501 Charlotte Street in Kansas City. Mickey had been with the Hires Company for nine years before he resigned to launch the Kansas City project. The new bottling works was established at a cost of more than \$100,000 and could turn out 2,400 cases of root beer a day--the equivalent of 120 twelve ounce bottles per minute. When Jim attended the opening of the new bottling works on April 27, 1938, to witness the first day of "full steam production," he was greeted by a lot of stalled machinery which refused to operate. Repairs were made in short order, without benefit of McGee's mechanical help. Jim's participation in the bottling business was confined to an occasional weekend inspection visit. A wartime sugar shortage forced the Jordan brothers to sell the franchise back to Hires. However, they also operated a bottling plant for the popular Nesbitt's Orange Drink. Among Jim's other varied business interests were: real estate, a construction firm in Nevada, and a sand-blasting equipment factory in Peoria.

The radio show made many references to Marian and Jim's early days in Peoria and of their old school chums and grammar schoolteacher, Miss Fiditch. Also Fibber's fictitious vaudeville partner, Fred Nitney of Starved Rock, Illinois.

Jim once commented: "There never was a Fred Nitney, nor was there ever a person in my life like him."

Sometimes McGee mentioned another of his old pals, Egghead Vanderween, which was obviously a parody of the name of his real-life vaudeville partner, Egbert Van Alstyne. Names of real persons, particularly relatives and close friends of the cast and crew were often used by the masterful Quinn for fictional characters in the scripts. As an example, on the broadcast of May 4, 1948, Fibber nearly sold his house to a Professor Pittman, the character was named after the program's producer, Frank Pittman. The role



Marian and Jim are visited by some youngsters on a movie set.

was played by Gale Gordon. On the program of May 25th that same season, three policemen were named "Needham, Louis and Brorby," after the founding members of the advertising agency which handled the McGee account for Johnson's Wax.

Mentioned in many episodes were Molly's relatives, Uncle Dennis, who sometimes came to visit, and at one time lived with the McGees, as well as her rich Aunt Sarah Driscoll, who was (in)famous for having presented the McGees with one of their most unique wedding gifts--a marble statue of Venus, with a clock in her stomach. Fibber poked fun at Aunt Sarah's frugality with a typical McGeeism: "She's tighter than a bull fighter's pants!" Reminiscences of Fibber's army days were recounted on many occasions, at which time he always referred to the year as "Nineteen-Ought-Eighteen".

Quinn's scripts dealt with common everyday happenings, but he kept his finger on the pulse of what made audiences laugh. He had a true genius for creating off-beat, but usually believable characters. Some were ethnic stereotypes with whimsical names and colorful backgrounds (i.e., their genesis were rainbow-hued). Some of these characters seldom spoke a line, but faithful listeners came to know them, nonetheless. Molly first mentioned her Uncle Dennis on the program of November 23, 1936, and thereafter he became a frequent subject of conversation. Listeners soon came to realize that dear, delirious Dennis was faced with a definite drinking dilemma. On rare occasions when he was heard to mutter a brief line or two, the thick-tongued voice was supplied by versatile Bill Thompson. During the 1943/1944 season when Thompson was in the Navy, Ranson Sherman, who was then a regular on the show, spoke on occasion for Uncle Dennis. However, the character seemed to work best and generate more laughs without uttering a word. He was usually heard voicelessly stumbling about.

Other whimsical Wistful Vista neighbors got themselves involved in comedy situations with McGee. Seldom heard to speak, were the next-door neighbors, the Toopses--Mort and Mabel, and their three troublesome offsprings--Willy, Theresa, and Harry. They also had a bothersome dog that sometimes took a nip out of the McGee's mailman. There were also other assorted animals that became involved in some of the amusing antics.

One character who was heard perhaps no more than once, but who was a very familiar name to all McGee fans, was Myrt, the telephone operator, who was introduced on the show of January 10, 1938. Whenever Fibber picked up the phone, no matter how urgent the call might be, he was sure to be side-tracked long enough to carry on a pleasant little chat with Myrt:

Can You IMAGINE...

**EDGAR BERGEN**

with Charlie in his hair, and butterflies on the brain



**CHARLIE MCCARTHY**

as a screwloose papoose on a girl scout reservation

**FIBBER MCGEE**

up in the air with some high finance



**and MOLLY**

on her second honeymoon in a haunted house!



ALL TOGETHER AGAIN  
IN THEIR 2nd BIG SCREEN HIT

**ere We Go Again**



plus

'THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE' ← Harold Peary →  
GINNY SIMMS · Bill Thompson · Gale Gordon  
Isabel Randolph as 'Uppy' · 'Mortimer Snerd'  
RAY NOBLE and BAND Produced and Directed by ALLAN DWAN



Screen Play by Paul Gerard Smith and Joe Bigelow — Story by Paul Gerard Smith

"Oh, is that you, Myrt? . . . How's every little thing, Myrt? . . . Your brother did what? . . . Fell down the stairs and smashed his face and broke off one of his hands! Oh, my gosh . . ."

Molly would break in just about then to utter her famous: "Heavenly Days! The poor lad . . ."

And then Fibber would continue: ". . . Dropped his watch again, eh?"

A very unusual thing happened on the broadcast of June 22, 1943. Myrt stopped by at 79 Wistful Vista to bid the McGees a happy summer vacation. On this very rare occasion when Myrt was heard to speak, the voice was supplied by Shirley Mitchell. Incidentally, the McGee's phone number was Wistful Vista 1 0 7 3.

### All Hail the Hall Closet

The McGee show gave radio one of its most famous sound-effects--FIBBER MCGEE'S HALL CLOSET--that was forever on the verge of erupting more vociferously than Mt. Vesuvius.

The closet gag was introduced on the program of March 5, 1940, and the special sound effect was prepared by soundman Manny Segal. On the show, while Fibber was hunting for a dictionary, he foolishly yanked open the door of the hall closet and out tumbled the now famous conglomeration of noisy sound effects.

Reportedly, the sound was made by an odd assortment of articles including:

Ten empty oil cans ... a pair of roller skates ... an old snow shoe ... a barrellful of broken crockery ... a bowling pin ... two boxes of old kitchenware ... a rake ... egg-beater ... three cowbells ... and Fibber's old mandolin!!!

With nerves of steel, and a very steady hand, the sound effects man cautiously piled these odd tools of his trade high on top of a portable staircase, from whence they were tumbled noisily upon the proper cue.

Among the men who performed this challenging task so dutifully were: Manny Segal (1935). Don Mehan (1937), Jack Wormser, Virgil Rymar (1941). Frank Pittman (1942), and Monte Fraser (1944). Back in 1937 the program had also used the services of two sound effects women, Eleanor Weems and Mrs. Ted Williams, for a very brief period.

Billy Mills wrote a song entitled, "The Sound Effects Man," with lyrics by Ken Darby. It was performed on the McGee show



Marian and Jim romp on the lawn with family pets. The Jordans enjoyed 'outdoor living' in their white Monterey-type 'dream house,' located on three acres of land. The first floor rooms opened onto the terrace, and second floor bedrooms opened onto a long balcony overlooking the largest oak tree in the San Fernando Valley. Best of all - their home was located within nine miles of the NBC studios (1940).

several times by the King's Men, with an able assist by the various soundmen on duty. It was first heard on the broadcast of June 17, 1941, and gave soundman Virgil Rymar a chance to shine.

The lyrics are printed here with permission from Mr. Darby:

"The Sound Effects Man"

"Oh, what would we do without the Sound Effects Man?

That Radio Racket-er.

Tune your dial and listen awhile

This is what you'll hear:

There's a knock upon the door -

(Sound: Knock, Knock, Knock)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

Here's a kiss and maybe more:

(Sound: Kiss, Kiss, Kiss)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

If you'd like a ring

(Sound: R-R-Ring!)

He'll give you a Ding, Ding, Ding

(Sound: Ding, Ding, Ding)

And early in the early morn

You'll hear him blow his horn

(Sound: Honk!!!)

Now boys come galloping fit to bust

(Sound: Galloping Clippity-Clop)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

Four more red-skins bite the dust)

(Sound: Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

He has such an awful lot to do,

And yet he very seldom ever misses a cue.

He's a three-alarm fire and the Fire Chief, too

(Sound: Sirens screaming)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

When the wind is howling

(Sound: Wind Whooshes)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

Thunder gives a growling -

(Sound: Thunder rumbles)

That's the Sound Effects Man!

When the battle is raging,

He's right in the middle of the fray

(Sound: Machine gun Ratta-Tat-Tat)

When he blows his whistle



FIBBER MCGEE AND  
MOLLY in Radio City High on  
the Great Overalls  
Walt Disney Photo Studio

At home in their garden, 'Molly' offers her best beau 'Fibber' a pretty posy, to which he reacts coyly. (1946).

(Sound: Tweet, Tweet, Tweet)  
 Crime doesn't pay!  
 Benny's old Maxwell chuggin' right along  
 (Sound: Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep)  
 That's the Sound Effects Man!  
 When Kay Kyser gets the answer all wrong 'Students!'  
 (Sound: Bell Dings)  
 That's the Sound Effects Man!  
 Hear those footsteps  
 (Sound: Clomp, Clomp, Clomp)  
 Making lots of muddy tracks  
 (Sound: Stomp, Stomp, Stomp)  
 Dirty boots will never hurt the kitchen floor  
 If it's covered with Johnson's Wax  
 (Sound: Cash Register rings up another sale)  
 Tailspin Tommy in his aero-plane  
 (Sound: Airplane motor dives)  
 That's the Sound Effects Man!  
 When McGee breaks a window pane  
 (Sound: Glass shatters)  
 That's the Sound Effects Man!  
 He has gadgets by the score  
 From a peanut-whistle to a cannon's roar.  
 When Fibber runs to open that closet door -  
 'Look out!'  
 (Sound: Closet junk tumbles out, a bell tinkles)  
 'Gotta straighten out that closet -  
 One of these days' (Spoken by Jim Jordan)  
 That's \_\_\_\_\_, the Sound Effects Man!

Running gags such as the noisy hall closet had been eagerly sought by writer Don Quinn. Jim recalled the way the recurring sound of the broken sofa spring on THE SMITH FAMILY program had become so popular, he told Quinn about it, and they began experimenting with the idea of a recurring sound for the McGee show.

Year after year, Fibber procrastinated about cleaning out the hall closet "one of these days." Several programs were devoted to just such a task. On October 21, 1941, and again on April 7, 1942, Fibber cleaned out the closet in search of waste materials to aid the war effort. On February 2, 1943, McGee moved all of the junk from the hall closet into the linen closet--temporarily. Then, again on June 5, 1945, he tried to straighten out the mess, but to no avail. Faithful listeners of the McGee show were given an unnerving jolt



A Paramount Pictures publicity still showing Marian Jordan 'all dressed up as Teeny' for the Jordans' screen debut in **THIS WAY PLEASE**. However, Teeny did not appear in the film (1937).

on the program of March 11, 1947, when Doc Gamble accidentally opened the door to the hall closet--to complete silence.

After a long pause, Fibber delightfully exclaimed:

"I cleaned out the hall closet!"

It never came as much of a surprise when the closet's voluminous contents poured forth and produced McGee's old mandolin. At such times he would tenderly pick it up and clutch it to his bosom and strum a few bars of "Pretty Red Wing." Then he would begin to reminisce about the good old days in vaudeville with his partner, Fred Nitney.

Steady listeners to the show knew there would be hilarious complications whenever Mrs. McGee asked her spouse to put up the window screens, or fix the washing machine, or do any other minor repair around the house. They knew, too, that Fibber's incendiary temper was bound to flare instantaneously at the slightest irritation, such as the newspaper not being delivered on time, or if the mail was a little late. Then, without blinking an eye, the "Eternal Crusader of Wistful Vista" would take on the Associated Press or the U.S. Postal System in nothing flat!

## Teeny

Among the parade of colorful characters who came knocking on the McGee's front door, or intruded unannounced, the most notable standout was Teeny--the smallest, but by no means the least. It was always a treat when Marian shifted gears in her versatile voice and became the precocious little imp who loved to taunt McGee with: "Whatcha doin', huh, mister? Huh, whatcha doin'? Huh?. Whatcha?"

She constantly tossed in the phrase, "I betcha," as she would plague poor Fibber with endless questions until he was in a near state of apoplexy. Then, in this weakened condition, as he would feebly attempt to offer some answer, she would completely shatter him with a smart-alecky "I KNOW IT!"

The tenacious tyke could also induce profound confusion by interjecting her quizzical "Hm-m-m-m-m?" into the most unexpected places. At times she would ask Mr. McGee to tell her a "poodle," explaining that a "poodle is a riddle--that you can't get through your noodle." Teeny was an expert riddler herself and would often perplex McGee with her recitations of same:

And she was never at a loss for some clever new scheme to extricate a quarter, and sometimes, as much as a whole dollar, from



A smiling Twosome from Peoria, Illinois, Jim and Marian Jordan. The atmosphere of their broadcasts was always simple, friendly and 'homey'.

the usually stingy storyteller.

On December 21, 1948, Teeny divulged the fact that her real name was "Elizabeth," and went on to explain that her father had given her the nickname "Teeny" when she was a baby--"Because, just like a mar-tini, I was never quite drv enough to suit him!"

Teeny liked to brag about her boyfriend Willy Toops and her male dog which she adoringly called "Margaret." She once explained to Mr. McGee that her dog was a "Cockle-Spaniard. . . He used to be a police dog--but he quit!"

On the program of September 29, 1942, the cute cherub chided Fibber with:

"You'll be sorry when I grow up and become a movie star and wear a bathing suit in the magazine section of the Sunday papers--and marry Walter Pidgeon."

It was no wonder that McGee sometimes was heard to mutter:

"I still think that kid's a midget!"

One of Teeny's longest running gags was introduced on the program of March 4, 1941 when she repeatedly stressed the catch phrase, "I'm hungry!" Thereafter, on succeeding shows, the mere mention of anything that even vaguely reminded her of food would cause her to wail "I'M HUNGRY!" She sometimes sang on the program. On her very first appearance on the McGee show on October 14, 1935, she sang "Little Yeller Dog." When the McGees held an amateur show on the broadcast of October 14, 1936, Teeny rivaled Shirley Temple with a dimpled-darling rendition of "Animal Crackers in My Soup." On October 3, 1939, she delighted listeners with "We're Off to See the Wizard (of Oz)."

It was on the December 22, 1942 program that Teeny first joined her little buddies Kenny, Jonny, Buddy, and Raddy (the King's Men) and the Billy Mills band in a musical version of Clement C. Moore's "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." The number, with a special score composed and arranged by Ken Darby, became a Christmas season tradition on the show and was repeated each year through 1952 (except in the years 1948 and 1951). Capitol Records released a recording of same in 1945. The Jordans were joined on the recording by the King's Men and the Mills orchestra. The album also contained a delightful holiday story about a little Christmas tree, related by Fibber. The script was by Don Quinn.

Another Christmas tradition was begun on the broadcast of December 6, 1949, when Teeny joined the King's Men to sing "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." It was repeated during each holiday season thereafter through 1952.

In the annals of broadcasting history, along with Fanny Brice's "Baby Snooks," Edgar Bergen's "Charlie McCarthy," and Tommy



The Jordans enjoyed enduring affiliation with both the Johnson Wax Company and the NBC network.

Rigg's "Betty Lou," Marian Jordan's "TEENY" remains one of radio's best beloved brats.

### Other Voices

Marian Jordan was a very fine actress. In addition to her endearing performances as Molly McGee and Teeny, she was also heard portraying several other character voices heard on the program from time to time. Most of these characters were carryovers from the SMACKOUT show on which she had supplied the voices for dozens of different female characters of all types and ages. Among her best-remembered characterizations was "Geraldine," a giddy, fast-talking gal, whose husband was named Gerald. She always muttered, "Biddle-Biddle-Biddle," as she was leaving. Another specialty was the very slow-talking, woebegone "Mrs. Bedelia Wearybottom," as well as the elderly but effervescently energetic "Widow Cornelia (Corny) Wheedledeck." On the program of June 1, 1936, Marian supplied yet another voice as "Miss Ernestine Wafflebatter," an authority on Home Economy.

Although Jim Jordan was equally adept at doing character voices, his role as Fibber was so predominant that it left little or no opportunity to supply other voices on the show. However, in some of the very earliest broadcasts, he had supplied the voice for the smart-alecky neighbor, "Mort Toops," first heard on the program of October 14, 1935. Ten years later, On October 16, 1945, Jim once again demonstrated his ability at dialects in a bit of business on the phone, during which time he assumed several different vocal disguises while attempting to make some train reservations.

Other than a few rare exceptions after the first season on the air as Fibber and Molly, the Jordan's many musical talents were not utilized on the show. One rare occasion took place on the program for June 1, 1948 when they sang a few lines of a song entitled, "Fibber's Tune." The sweet harmony they had employed in their many early musical broadcasts and vaudeville appearances was clearly evident. Another fine example of Jim's pure tenor voice was heard in his fine rendition of "Back Home Again in Indiana" during the broadcast of June 12, 1951. This marked the last known time that Jim sang on the airwaves.

Jim and Marian's days in vaudeville had also made them masters of comedy timing, and radio was the perfect medium for them. Each had a delicious sense of humor and enough sincerity and humility to endear them to their legion of listeners, in both the U.S.

# FIBBER Mc GEE AND MOLLY ON NBC

JOHNSON'S WAX PRESENTS  
 FIBBER Mc GEE & MOLLY & CO.  
 NBC RED NETWORK  
 TUESDAYS - 6:30 P.M.



Announcer HAROLD HILL



BILL THOMPSON  
 (The Old Timer,  
 Moraho Boomer)



HAROLD PEARY  
 (Gilderleere)



THE KINGS MEN



ISABEL RANDOLPH  
 (Mrs. Uppington)



Writer DON QUINN



Maestro BILLY MILLS



Paul KELLY

Stations - KFI KPO KGW KOMO KHQ KMJ KDYL KOA



A 1941 NBC poster with members of the Wistful Vista family, listing west coast NBC affiliates.

and Canada. Jim Jordan ranks with the best of comedians in any entertainment field. Likewise, he must be numbered among the quickest wits and was undoubtedly the smoothest of all ad-libbers. He could sail through the most difficult tongue-twisting monolog with the greatest of ease, and yet, at times, could stumble over the simplest of statements. He would immediately pick up on a flub, be it his own, or that of some other member of the cast, and turn it into a sure-fire laugh getter. Announcer Wilcox was easily broken up by Jim's ad-libs and sly asides. Even Marian was often convulsed by her husband's off-the-cuff antics on the air. Hers was a full hearty infectious laugh which would spread contagiously throughout the entire audience.

### The Neighbors Come to Call

Comedian Gracie Allen made a guest appearance on the McGee show of May 5, 1940. But, as a rule, the show did not use big name guests. Instead, writer Quinn expressed his comic genius by creating a population of Wistful Vista citizens who came to call on Fibber and Molly each week.

The first member of the cast of regular supporting actors was an expert dialectician, Bill Thompson. In 1934, at the age of twenty-one, Indiana-born Thompson won an audition with NBC, while appearing at the Century of Progress show in Chicago. The young talented Hoosier wowed the judges with a comedy sketch that involved ten different characters with varying dialects. Signed to a contract with NBC, Thompson made guest appearances on programs such as JAMBOREE and DON McNEIL'S BREAKFAST CLUB. He introduced his Wallace Wimple voice on the latter, at the same time that the Jordans were also making occasional guest appearances on the show. In addition, in the spring of 1935, Thompson appeared on a comedy program called THE HOFFINGHAMS on station WENR, on which he portrayed a character named "Count Foronicholas Drinkalotopop," and spoke with a very heavy Greek accent.

Thompson's talents were brought to the McGee show for the first time on January 27, 1936, at which time he used much the same Greek accent in a zany impersonation of a restaurant owner called Nick Porkenhoppolis. The very first words he uttered on the show was a heavily accented "'allo keed." He proceeded to call McGee "Fizzer," while referring to Molly as "Kewpie." When Mr. Gildersleeve entered the scene, Nick promptly started calling him



Citizens of Wistful Vista - Wallace Wimple (Bill Thompson) with his famous 'bird book', Doc Gamble (Arthur Q. Bryan) with his well worn satchel, and Mr. and Mrs. Fibber McGee!

"Mr. Gilderpuss," and so it went. Nick piled up malaprop upon malaprop, causing the studio audience to go into hysterics.

The following week, the actor was brought back to the McGee show once again, and was heard as the very Irish "Sgt. Clancy," proving his adeptness with dialects. Thompson later played another Greek character called "Nick DeMopolis," which eventually evolved into "Nick DePopolous," a long-time favorite on the program.

By the late 40's, ethnic stereotypes were being frowned upon on the airwaves and Thompson deleted his Greek-accented characterizations. One of his final performances as Nick DePopolous was on the broadcast of April 8, 1947. However, on November 22, 1949, he was heard as "Gus", the owner of a Greek restaurant, but with a much modified accent.

Thompson's versatility seemed unending. As early as March 9, 1936, he had been heard as a cunning "con man", who sounded very much like the irascible W.C. Fields. Originally, the character was named "Mr. Blotto," but by September of that year, he had become known as "Horatio K. Boomer," and went on to be a long-time staple on the show. Screen star Fields was well aware of Thompson's uncanny impersonation of his vocal mannerisms, and, in fact, went on record to comment:

"It's damned good!"

When Fields became a regular radio performer, himself, on YOUR HIT PARADE program in 1938, the Boomer character was temporarily dropped by Thompson, who, with all others concerned, felt that it would be unfair to continue with "Boomer," while Fields was being heard regularly on the air.

During his initial appearance on the McGee show, Boomer was the owner of a carnival, The Horatio K. Boomer Combined Carnivals. When the character was brought back on September 28th, he was referred to as "Colonel Boomer," and was the owner of a decrepit race horse named "My Baby." When heard from again on March 22, 1937, Boomer was called "Tresto--the Prestidigitateur," but soon reverted to the Boomer characterization.

Most of Boomer's routines would wind up by having him conduct a thorough search of his pockets for some misplaced item. As he extracted each item from his seemingly bottomless pocket, he would mention it by name, and then would always wind up saying . . . "and--a check for a short beer."

Among Thompson's other early heavily-accented characterizations, were the very Scottish, Angus MacPerson MacKenzie MacTavish, and Donald O'Donnell MacDonald, as well as the very Russian-sounding Nikolas Andreiev Alexandrovitch



Bill Thompson as 'the Old Timer' breaks up Mr. Fibber.

Ivanoffsky Smikelovna, in addition to, Serge Vassilivitch Roffmanisoff, and yet another Russian character known only as "Vodka."

Another character with which Thompson is closely identified with is The Old Timer. But he was not the first actor to be heard in the role. As early as March 1936, the character of a deaf old man first appeared and was portrayed by Cliff Arquette. The old man reappeared frequently through September 7th with Arquette continuing in the role. After he left the program, the old man was brought back on the broadcast of November 16, 1936, at which time Bill Thompson, a master of dialects and with a keen ear for voices, perfectly duplicated Arquette's characterization of the old man. There is a marked similarity between the voices of Thompson's "Old Timer" and Arquette's "Charlie Weaver" character, which he later made famous on television.

The Old Timer once stated that his full given name was "Rupert Blasingame." He frequently greeted Molly with "Hello, there, daughter!" And the feisty old codger never failed to stymie Fibber's best tall tale with:

"Well, that's pretty good, Johnny. But that ain't the way I hear-ed it . . . . The way I hear-ed it--one feller says to t'other feller--Say-ay-ay, he sez . . ."

This famous expression was first used on the broadcast of October 11, 1938, and soon became a familiar catch phrase of the show. On the occasion of the program's 200th broadcast on April 11, 1939, the entire cast joined voices to sing a Billy Mills composition entitled: "That Ain't the Way I Hear-ed It!"

The Old Timer often spoke of his mama and papa, as well as his best gal, Bessie. He once confided to the McGees that he had first met Bessie at a wresting match, in which she was a contender known as "Meathook Mabel--the Milwaukee Monster."

On April 15, 1941, Thompson reached into his bagful of vocal tricks and extracted another memorable character, the marvelously mild "Milquetoast of the Airwaves"--Wallace Wimple. The woebegone Wimple always greeted his friends, the McGees, with a meek: "Hello, folks." He referred to big old wife Cornelia as "Sweetie Face," and once told the McGees that she had worked in a vaudeville act playing "The Carnival of Venice" on a trumpet with one hand, while beating out the rhythm of life--using him for her "punching bag."

Without a doubt the Wimples were the world's worse matched couple. They resided at 1345 Oak Street, but "Wimpy Wally" spent much of his time trying to escape the clutches of the brutish "Sweetie Face." He would sometimes find pleasure in plotting



Mrs. Abigail Uppington (Isabel Randolph) drove an electric town car and had a pet Pekingese named 'Fifi' who was the frequent subject of her fluttery conversations with the McGees. 'Uppy' was a member of the Wistful Vista 'upper crust', and punster McGee promptly defined 'upper crust' as: "a bunch of crumbs-held together by dough".

some vile revenge on his abusive spouse--and at such times, would chortle wickedly in his own inimitable way.

The tyrannical Mrs. Wimple taught jujitsu to the police force, while mousy Wallace dabbled in poetry and practiced his favorite sport--bird-watching. He usually toted a reference book on birds with him when he visited the McGees, and his mere mention of the phrase "bird book," would bring gales of laughter from the audience. Molly and/or Fibber would try to get him to repeat the phrase several times--and each time the laughter grew stronger. Another of Wimple's favorite descriptive phrases was "that's just peachy," which he would use in most any situation.

Late in the fall of 1949, Thompson introduced yet another of his zany characterizations--a mumbling street-car conductor whose every word was totally unintelligible. His extremely poor enunciation was accredited to the fact that his mother had been a long-distance telephone operator and his father, an auctioneer.

### **Mrs. Uppington - and Other Upper-Crust**

Isabel Randolph was another early member of the cast of regular supporting players. She was heard as early as Program #40 on January 13, 1936, as the very haughty-sounding, Mrs. Kuppenheim, whom Fibber called "Kuppy." She also was heard in various other roles, mostly as snooty society matrons with names like: Mrs. Dillingham (Dilly)-Skunkls, Mrs. Jay Mitchell-Twitchell, Mrs. J. Waldemar Loganberry and Mrs. J. Uppingham Upson, and others with sur names such as Gildersleeve, Partridge and Perkins. By October 1938, Miss Randolph settled down into one memorable society matron--Mrs. Abigail Uppington, who lived at #97 Wistful Vista and drove an electric town car. Her pet Pekingese "Fifi" was a frequent subject of her fluttery conversations with the McGees. Fibber referred to her as "Uppy", and everything in her imperious intonations indicated that she was frowning through her lorgnette, as she looked down her regal nose at him. McGee once remarked that he thought she had her nose out of joint so much of the time, that she had to carry her glasses around on a stick. Uppity Abigail described herself as being "a member of the upper-crust," and punster McGee promptly defined upper-crust as: "a bunch of crumbs--held together by dough."

Sometimes the snobbish Mrs. Uppington would make a careless slip of the lip and inadvertently reveal some well-kept secret from



Excellent character study of Isabel Randolph as uppity "Mrs. Uppington" and Hal Peary as the pompous "Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve". Still from 1941 RKO film LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING.

her colorful past, such as the fact that she had once worked in her father's laundry. On the broadcast of May 28, 1940, another carefully guarded secret was accidentally divulged when circus owner Buster Dawson (played by Gale Gordon) came to town and recognized Mrs. Uppington as the former "Mme. Tootsie LaTorre--Queen of the Bare-Back Riders." Tootsie was reknown for performing a remarkable feat--a double back-flip, through three paper hoops--landing in a hand-stand position! It was during one such demonstration that something frightened her horse and it threw her and she landed in the lap of Mr. Uppington, who was seated in the front row of the audience. He proposed marriage just as soon as they had revived him. Abigail's maiden name was Bigglesworth and she once gave her full name as "Mrs. Abigail Farthingale Uppington," so it's possible the old girl may have had more than one marriage. She was quite a flirtatious creature and during broadcasts in 1939, she had a torrid romance with none other than Horatio K. Boomer. In March of that year, the wealthy widow announced that she and Boomer were engaged. But the marriage was soon called off, most likely by the evasive Boomer. By the following March, Abigail was romantically involved with "Maestro William Mills." And in 1942, her name was being linked with Molly's Uncle Dennis!

On the broadcast of February 9, 1943, Mrs. Uppington attempted to enlist in the WAAC's. Although she was rejected and was absent from the program for several weeks, she did return and made her final grand exit from the show of June 22, 1943--by opening the wrong door--the one leading into Fibber's overstuffed hall closet. Mrs. Uppington literally went out with a bang!

After Isabel Randolph's departure from the program several other members of the Wistful Vista elite set were introduced from time to time, including the socially-minded Mrs. Millicent Carstairs, as played to perfection by Bea Benaderet. In 1950, Elvia Allman was heard as the equally snobbish, Mrs. Clammer.



Hal Peary had played a long line of characters, all named 'Gildersleeve', before he became Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. Another of his delightful characterizations on the show was 'Goey Foey', a Chinese laundryman. On August 31, 1941 he began his own series 'The Great Gildersleeve' - radio's first spin-off series.

## Gildersleeve

Marian and Jim first became acquainted with Hal Peary when they worked together on KALTENMEYER'S KINDERGARTEN. Peary was called in to play the role of the Italian father of one of the school's pupils. Peary once recalled that in some of his earliest appearances on the McGee program, he had participated in the program's "warm-up" sessions. Seated in the studio audience, when Harlow Wilcox would welcome the audience to the Fibber McGee show, Peary would jump up and rush out yelling: "Let me out of here!"

One of the actor's first roles on the McGee show occurred on the broadcast of October 4, 1937, at which time he was heard as a blustery mayor named Appleby, whom Fibber aptly dubbed "Apple puss." The versatile actor was heard on the show frequently after that, portraying an endless assortment of characters including: a fussy interior decorator, a dignified art instructor, a bombastic Army General, piano salesman, taxi driver and an Italian wrestler. Peary also portrayed assorted doctors, lawyers, and possibly a few Indian chiefs, as well as optometrists and dentists. He was also heard as the stuffy Cicero Clod, as well as the veddy-veddy British, Lord Bingham. On one show he was a vain movie star named "Silverscreen," and on another, he portrayed a theater manager called "Mr. Frite-Wig." Peary had also been cast as a department store owner named "Dinwiddie." Many of the characters he portrayed had also been named "Gildersleeve." He had once been heard as Widdicomb P. Gildersleeve, president of the Gildersleeve Baby Carriage factory, and at other times was the manager of a girdle factory.

On November 1, 1937, Peary was heard as Wistful Vista's famous druggist, Mr. Cramer. On February 14, 1938, he introduced one of his more permanent characterizations, a Chinese laundryman called "Gooley-Fooley." Finally, on October 17, 1939, Peary became the McGee's pompous neighbor, Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. The name "Throckmorton" came from the name of the street on which the actor was living on in Chicago at the time. The initial "P" reportedly stood for "Peary."

Grandiose Gildersleeve resided at #83 Wistful Vista with his wife and mother-in-law who were often mentioned, but never heard to speak. Gildy had a great Dane appropriately named "Hamlet." Fibber once quipped that a "Great Dane is a dog who has the house broke before he is." With his smug superiority complex, Gildersleeve was the perfect foil for windbag McGee, whom he



Molly, Gildersleeve, Fibber, Mrs. Uppington and Edgar Bergen. A still from a 1941 film, LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING.

often called "little chum". The mis-matched duo managed to disagree on just about everything and were eternally on the brink of mortal combat. They once fought a duel--with water hoses. Each confrontation between the quarrelsome pair would usually find the nonplussed Gildersleeve muttering:

"You're a ha-aa-rd man, McGee!"

Gildersleeve's most outstanding characteristic was his rollicking laughter. Hal Peary was a fine actor and gifted musician and used his facile voice advantageously. Gildy's various forms of laughter found his voice running up and down the full musical scale with the greatest of ease, registering every possible emotion, as well. Gildy's laughter could denote moods other than amusement. It also conveyed such sentiments as: anger, fear, envy, outrage, surprise, and on many occasions--while in verbal combat with McGee--utter contempt.

Of the dozens of supporting characters who appeared on the program, Gildersleeve had one of the shortest runs, but made perhaps the biggest impression. The character became a radio personality in his own right and eventually Peary left the McGee show to star on a program of his own. "The Great Gildersleeve" was radio's first "spin-off" series. It debuted on August 31, 1941 and was produced by Cecil Underwood and directed by Frank Pittman, both of whom had long associations in the same capacity on the McGee show. In addition, the first scripts for the Gildersleeve series were written by Phil Leslie. Even the Billy Mills band was on hand to provide the music for "Gildy's" first solo season. Many of the same talented performers were heard on both shows: Cliff Arquette, Gale Gordon, Richard LeGrand, Arthur Q. Bryan, Ken Christy, Shirley Mitchell, Bea Benaderet and several others. Walter Tetley, the young actor best remembered for his role as Gildersleeve's bratty nephew, LeRoy, had also made some early appearances on the McGee program.

Hal Peary gave up the role of Gildersleeve after the broadcast of June 14, 1950 and went into another starring radio series, "Honest Harold." Meanwhile, Willard Waterman, an actor with a very similar sounding voice, took over the role of Gildersleeve for NBC on September 20, 1950. Actor Waterman's voice could duplicate much of what Peary had done with the role, except the inimitable laugh. That was Peary's trademark. He never returned to the role even though the character was a radio staple for many more years, as played by Waterman.



In the 1942 RKO film **HERE WE GO AGAIN** Molly met up on the screen with her old beau 'Otis Cadwallader' played by Gale Gordon.

## Mayor LaTrivia

Throughout the 1940's the Jordans' popularity ascended steadily and the McGee program constantly vied for the Number One position along with other radio giants: Benny, Burns and Allen, and Hope.

The McGee program underwent a series of cast changes in the late 30's and early 40's. Certainly one of the most fortuitous additions to the cast during this period was Gale Gordon. The busy actor began to make frequent appearances on the program in a variety of roles. At first he was heard as a man whom the McGees kept meeting on the street, but never could remember his name. On the broadcast of February 13, 1940, Gordon was cast as Attorney Corpus of the legal firm of Habeas and Corpus. On February 27th he was heard as an optometrist, Dr. Cyclops, and on March 12th he portrayed a pompous headwaiter. On March 19th he was back again as a cheeky mailman and on May 21st appeared as the owner of a circus, Buster Dawson. On other occasions he had been heard as one of Molly's old beaus, Otis Cadwallader.

When Gildersleeve moved away from Wistful Vista to become the Water Commissioner of the neighboring town of Summerfield, Fibber was left without a verbal sparring partner. Possibly it was for that very reason that the high-hatted and hard-headed character of Mayor Charles. LaTrivia was created. As the blustery Mayor, Gale Gordon was a standout. The actor was well-known on the airwaves for his dramatic performances and the McGee program was his first attempt at comedy and he proved to be a fine comedian. Some of the show's funniest moments occurred when Mr. McGee and his missus would deliberately pretend not to understand the meaning of the very verbose mayor's words. If, perchance, he used a metaphor, Fibber and Molly took his words literally, which would evoke a lot of hilarity. They would get the mayor so confused that he, himself, was no longer sure of what he had intended to say in the first place. They would continue ribbing him until they had him reduced to a pitiful pulp.

One such hilarious occasion occurred when LaTrivia had innocently passed a remark about "playing possum", the playful pair from Peoria managed to get him so perplexed he wound up delivering this tongue-tied testimony:

". . . Look, when I said I was playing possum, I merely meant I was lowing lye . . . Er, lying low . . . I never said I was . . . You're the one that always mis-con-words my strues . . . strue remarks my words! . . . Everytime I stake a simple matement . . .



Otis Cadwallader (Gale Gordon) seems quite pleased to see Gildersleeve point the finger at Fibber. HERE WE GO AGAIN RKO (1942).

er, make a staple mintment . . . stinkle statement . . . minkel stutmeant . . . LOOK . . . You're the one . . . I . . . YOU . . ."

And just as he reached the explosion stage, LaTrivia would take a long, dramatic pause and then intone, quite calmly

"McGee . . ."

The routine never failed to incite hilarity.

The fictional mayor's name was obviously borrowed from New York City's Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who had served the eastern city faithfully for eleven years during 1934/45. LaGuardia was one of the most respected, admired, and genuinely liked administrators the city ever had. He was affectionately known as "The Little Flower." During a newspaper strike in 1945, LaGuardia took to the air over station WNYC and read the comic strips to young listeners, so they would not miss out on the daily antics of their favorite funnypaper characters. The beloved New York mayor died on September 20, 1947, and when the McGee program returned to the air on October 7th, the LaTrivia character was temporarily dropped out of respect to LaGuardia.

In place of LaTrivia, Gale Gordon was heard in a new role--"Mr. Williams, the Weatherman." He told the McGees that his full given name was "F. Ogden Williams," and that the "F" in his name did not stand for anything in particular. His parents had merely left it "open," leaving it up to him to decide, but the unceasingly indecisive Mr. Williams could never quite make up his mind about much of anything--especially the weather. Fibber shortened F. Ogden's name to "Foggy," and he continued to be totally noncommittal in his weather forecasts.

When someone would solicit his opinion, he would answer with something like this:

"If you must know, and I don't know why you should, un-officially, and off the record, weather conditions will probably be - about general - if not better - or worse. One never knows for sure. Sometimes it's this, and sometimes it's that - or both - usually - one or the other - in a way - although - not definitely..."

Vague Foggy confided to the McGees that he had once studied the trumpet, as he thought he should know something about "wind instruments" if he was going to become a weatherman. Foggy's usual exit line was:

"I must go home and feed my groundhog. Well, good day - probably . . ."

Gordon was a very versatile actor and his dense weatherman characterization was a far cry from the urbane Mayor. During the 1947/48 season while the LaTrivia character was not being used, Gordon was sometimes heard in other roles, such as Karl Snarl,



Jim Jordan signs actress Lurene Tuttle's stuffed bear at NBC studios in Hollywood 1945. The bear was later donated to a charity auction where it fetched \$66,000 for the war effort.

the nasty-tempered manager of the Wistful Vista Finance Company. Fibber remarked that Snarl was the kind of a guy who would "glue the leaves together on his starving mother's last artichoke." Snarl was supposedly married to Harlow Wilcox's aunt, and in his office at the finance company he had a framed motto that read:

"The Man Who Holds Up His End  
Won't Have to Sit on A Tack."

The character of Mayor LaTrivia was resumed by Gordon on the broadcast of October 5, 1948 and remained a staple through June of 1953. Whatever role he was heard in, Gale Gordon's performances remained gems of expert timing and delivery.

### War Clouds Gather

The year 1940 brought several important additions to the McGee program. It was on the broadcast of February 6th that the King's Men quartet replaced tenor Jimmy Shields and became Wistful Vista's permanent vocalists for the next thirteen years. With the addition of the King's Men, the program took on a format it would maintain for many years.

During the spring season, Don Quinn took on an assistant writer, Leonard Levinson. The June 8th issue of *Movie and Radio Guide* magazine featured a colored photograph of Marian and Jim on its cover, showing a beaming Molly offering Fibber a pretty pink posy. The program ended the season on June 25th and the Jordans spent their summer vacation on a 6,000 mile motor trip through the Northwest in a house trailer. The replacement show for the summer was Meredith Wilson's "Musical Revue," sponsored by the Johnson Wax Company, with Harlow Wilcox doing the announcing and delivering the commercials in his usual smooth style. Featured vocalists on the show were Kay St. Germaine and Ray Hendricks.

When the McGee program returned on October 1st, Billy Mills and his band opened the show with some new theme music and Mrs. Uppington joined in the festivities by dancing a lively rhumba. On the program of December 17, 1940, Gildersleeve asked the McGees for their support in his campaign for President of the Wistful Vista Chamber of Commerce. But, by the usual turn of events, Fibber received the nomination instead, and was elected. In real life, on January 28, 1941, civic-minded Jim Jordan was



LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING (RKO, 1941). Fibber McGee, Charlie McCarthy, Lucille Ball, Edgar Bergen and Molly.

installed as President of the Encino Chamber of Commerce. He was also appointed Honorary Mayor of the same community.

The Jordans made a return visit to the Lux Radio Theatre program on February 24, 1941, to be heard in the comedy, "The Whole Town's Talking." On March 9th they donated their services to the Screen Guild Players program and were heard in a variety show along with Gary Cooper, Edward Arnold, Joan Bennett, and singer Frances Langford. On May 9th they joined Edgar Bergen, Burns and Allen, Bob Hope, Rudy Vallee, George Jessel and a host of others, to pay tribute to Jack Benny on the occasion of his tenth anniversary on the air. The tribute was held under the auspices of the National Broadcasting Company. The proceedings were recorded, but not aired. Another tribute took place when the Jordans dedicated the broadcast of June 17, 1941 to Billy Mills. The occasion marked his 10,000th broadcast. Mills had been active in radio for sixteen years and had made as many as a dozen broadcasts in a single day.

On September 8, 1941, RKO Pictures premiered a new feature length motion picture entitled, "Look Who's Laughing." The film brought together several of radio's most popular and outstanding personalities: Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Hal (Gildersleeve) Peary, and Jim and Marian Jordan. Other members of the McGee radio show making appearances in the film were Harlow Wilcox, Bill Thompson, and Isabel (Mrs. Uppington) Randolph. Appearing as Bergen's secretary and romantic interest was the then relatively unknown Lucille Ball, long before her "I Love Lucy" television fame.

Produced and directed by Allan Dwan, the film contained a certain pre-World War II topicality and achieved a sizeable box office success.

The screenplay was by James V. Kern, with Don Quinn and Leonard Levinson contributing the special material for the Jordans. The nonsensical plot concerned a small-town entrepreneur (Fibber McGee) and his wild scheme to lure an aircraft factory to Wistful Vista to boost the town's sagging economy.

Filming this second feature had been less taxing than their motion picture debut at Paramount studios. Marian had sufficiently recovered from her illness, and with their radio career firmly established, the demands on their time and energies was less of a drain.

During their 1941 summer vacation, Jim and Marian chartered a yacht for a relaxed trip to Juneau, Alaska. Jim, Jr. accompanied his parents on this outing. The entire family enjoyed a great deal of fishing, and each shot a black bear during the trip. Much to



The Jordan's daughter, Kathryn (Kay) seen here with radio actor Jack Creamer (1941).

everyone's surprise, Marian was the first to bag a bear. A few days later their teen-aged son also shot a bear. It wasn't until the last day of the hunting trip that big game hunter, Jim, Sr., finally bagged his prey. When the animal was measured, it was learned that "Fibber" had missed the world's record by just one-quarter-of-an-inch. At long last Jim had managed to live down a rather unflattering title, "The Quail Hunter," which had been jokingly bestowed upon him by family and friends. The title came about when a friend snapped a candid photo of Jim all decked out in full hunting gear, lying on his stomach in a field, aiming his trusty rifle at some object just out of view of the camera's lens. However, unbeknownst to the "Big Game Hunter," also prominently featured in the photo, were five of the tamest looking quail ever seen. The quaint quail quintet was seen gently nibbling at the hunter's expensive new boots. Hence the unflattering title.

The McGee show returned to the air on Tuesday, September 1941. Edgar Bergen and his constant companion, Charlie McCarthy, made a guest appearance with the McGees on the program of November 11th. The next day Bergen attended the world premiere of "Look Who's Laughing" at the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco. On November 15th Marian and Jim joined a host of other NBC personalities on the network's 15th Anniversary broadcast, which was entitled, "Free For All." On Christmas Eve the Jordans participated in a special broadcast for the American Red Cross.

Sometime during 1941, the Jordan's daughter, Kay, had tried for a radio career of her own. She did not rely on her parents' fame to pave the way for her. She took a routine talent audition at NBC, and a week later was assigned a small, part on a continuing drama entitled "Vance and Lila." The serial was heard only on the west coast, via the NBC Blue Network. In addition, it was reported that Kay also played a small role on the "I Love a Mystery" serial.

# ENCINO

COMMUNITY NEWS

10 cents



*Tibber McGee's Induction  
at Grace Hays's Lodge*

Jim Jordan doffs a western hat before his induction as president of the Encino, California Chamber of Commerce. A smiling Marian Jordan beams proudly. (January 31, 1941).

# WISTFUL VISTA GOES TO WAR

## Patriotism First

The "Fibber McGee and Molly" program frequently performed valuable public service by saluting causes such as: The American Red Cross, The Boy Scouts of America, The March of Dimes, and other charitable organizations. When the United States entered World War II, Don Quinn and the Jordans joined forces in keeping listeners at home well aware of the serious business of conserving essential materials and buying War Bonds. Quinn was cited for "gracefully and humorously infiltrating the popular program with the basic war issue by utilizing Office of War Information (OWI) messages and making it work to the credit of the sponsor."

The popular program launched an all-out campaign to aid the war effort. Quinn invented some of the most refreshing "war propaganda" heard over the airwaves. He built whole programs around wartime themes, and in his unique way of handling serious matters with a light touch, he kept the shows entertaining. When the OWI wanted to point up the careless waste of vital fuels by unnecessary travel, Quinn had Fibber attempt a two-hundred-and-thirty mile trip for undue reason. Fibber failed to get the train reservation he wanted and in the process, he received no sympathy from Molly, or anyone else. At the close of that particular program, Fibber relented and quipped:

"Looks like the railroads have bit off about as much as they can Choo-Choo."

The broadcast for December 9, 1941 was preceded by an announcement that the sponsor had requested that the program be interrupted for any important news or war information. A part of the comedy proceedings that evening had Mayor LaTrivia ask Fibber to purchase a world globe for him---at which Molly slyly quipped:

"If you want one with Japan on it, you better get one quick!"

The program closed that evening by having the patriotic cast joining the studio audience in singing, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." The following week's broadcast opened to the rousing strains of



Fibber and Molly 'cut up' in her dressing room on the set of LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING. (1941).

"The National Emblem March." In the weeks that followed, many patriotic songs were included on the show.

The broadcast for March 17, 1942 was pre-empted by an important public service information program entitled "Production Now," as part of an effort to speed up production of essential war materials.

Fibber's frustrating wartime problems were the subject of several very entertaining programs that spring. Some of the comedy proceedings revolved around a horse named "Lillian" that McGee bought for seventy-five dollars when the tires on his car began to wear thin. On another occasion, Fibber tried his hand at inventing a substitute for sugar, with sour results. Like all real towns across the country, Wistful Vista also had a meat shortage. One show found Fibber smacking his eager lips in anticipation as Molly went about preparing a very hard-to-get pot roast. Talkative LaTrivia stopped by and by the time he left, the roast was burnt to a crisp. So the McGees decided to go out to a restaurant for some pot roast. The final blow was cruelly dealt when Fibber learned that LaTrivia had got there just before them and had been served the last piece of meat in the house.

In the summer of 1942, the Jordans bought a 1,695 acre cattle ranch east of Bakersfield, California, in the Green Horn Mountains. They spent most of their summer vacation developing the ranch. In future years many of their vacations were spent at the ranch where they took delight in raising black angus cattle. The ranch also had excellent hunting and fishing facilities, as well.

When the McGee program returned to the air on September 29th, it was beamed by shortwave to servicemen overseas. On the first show of the new fall season, the Kings Men joined Billy Mills band to sing, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."

The direct effect of the war was felt by the show when two members of the cast left for the armed forces. Gale Gordon enlisted in the Coast Guard in December of 1942. During his absence, his actress wife Virginia, was sometimes heard on the show. Early in 1943, Bill Thompson left to enlist in the Navy. He was assigned to special duty, entertaining troops and wounded men. Thompson also held the distinction of being awarded a medal for selling more than two million dollars worth of Liberty Bonds.



Two masters of comedy writing responsible for virtually all of the dialogue in the first 1,317 Fibber McGee and Molly programs. Assistant writer Phil Leslie with writer/creator Don Quinn, at the Brown Derby in Hollywood 1947.

## Phil Leslie Joins the Show

In March of 1943, Don Quinn hired a new man to ease the script-writing load. He was Phil Leslie and his steadfast performance would prove him a man worthy of the title "writer." Leslie's first major assignment was the March 9th program entitled "A Visit to the Dairy." Until he left the series in March of 1956, Leslie's talents contributed greatly to the sustained popularity of the show.

Mr. Leslie summed up his feelings succinctly:

"Don Quinn hired me to write with him, and it was a big change in my whole life. Don was a wonderful man and had a very creative comedy mind. He was a great influence on my life. Writing for Fibber and Molly was just a ball ... To have had thirteen years of that kind of life with Marian and Jim, and the others, it was a joy! And I'd like to run it through one more time."

August 31, 1943 marked the Jordan's 25th wedding anniversary and NBC, along with the Johnson Wax Company, the cast, staff, and many of their friends, gave a gala celebration at the Ambassador Hotel in Hollywood.

Fibber and Molly began their new air season on September 28th minus the presence of Isabel Randolph who had left the radio program to concentrate on work in films. Radio veteran Ransom Sherman joined the supporting cast as Sigmund Wellington, the boastful manager of Wistful Vista's Bijou Theater. In the absence of socialite Uppington, snobbish Wellington supplied the high-brow element among the town's citizenry. The perpetually pretentious Wellington was always quite grandiose in both his manner and speech. His vocal pattern was such that he often paused for breath during his long sentences, separating multiple-syllable words--giving them a peculiar sound:

Wellington: "...You should have seen the picture we played here last week, 'Here We Go Again,' with Edgar Bergen and three dummies. There, my friend, was a cinematic canine that shouldn't happen to anybody ... And now, if you will excuse me, I must make arrangements for today's matin-ay ..."

In their concentrated effort to aid the war-time housing shortage, the McGees rented their spare bedroom to sweetly scatter-brained Alice Darling. The character was skillfully portrayed by Shirley Mitchell. Flighty Alice was a man-crazy defense plant worker who had an endless supply of 4-F gentlemen callers who tied up the McGee's phone for hours on end. She was deliciously demure and delightfully dense and always used "cutsie-poo" expressions such



Writer Phil Leslie and band leader Billy Mills standing beside the Royal Canadian Air Force plane that flew the cast and staff to Toronto for broadcast in October 1945.

as her favorites: "Crim-iny!." and "Creepers!." Alice's excessive sweetness and exaggerated innocence added new dimensions to the comedy content of the program. She was always a perfect foil for the dour McGee.

If master chef Don Quinn's sure-fire formula for concocting weekly servings of the well-blended Fibber McGee program might be likened to a recipe, the major ingredients would doubtlessly include:

A generous sprinkling of "sugar and spice" from Teeny, a half-cup of well-beaten Wallace Wimple, a tablespoonful of vinegary Mrs. Uppington, a thimble full of the aromatic spirits of Horatio K. Boomer, a pinch of the salty Old Timer, and a dash of peppery Doc Gamble, topped off by the good gravy of Gildersleeve, glow-coated with a rich Harlow Wilcox sauce, served alongside generous portions of plain meat-and-potatoes . . . FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY. (A mighty tempting dish to set before the King's Men.)

### The Doctor Is In

When actor Gordon entered the Coast Guard, Mayor LaTrivia left Wistful Vista with him and Fibber was left without a nemesis--but not for long. On April 6, 1943 a new character arrived in Wistful Vista in the person of Dr. George Gamble, as portrayed by the rotund and amiable Arthur Q. Bryan. Bryan had recently finished starring in the NBC comedy series, "Major Hoople, which had been scripted by Phil Leslie. It was Leslie who had suggested Bryan for the role of Dr. Gamble, and an excellent suggestion it was.

The character of Major Amos Hoople was an old windbag who claimed association with every military fighting outfit that had ever been mustered. He further claimed to be descended from a long line of English barons, one of whom had served in every prominent skirmish in English history. The boastful Major could out-fib even Fibber McGee.

Bryan's characterization of Doc Gamble was quite mellow in comparison to his bombastic Hoople role. The good doctor was less of a braggart, and therefore a perfect foil for Fibber. The outspoken medic was quick-witted and jovial and quite easy going--most of the time. He doled out pills and medicines and sly quips at the mere drop of a stethoscope.

McGee always greeted the doctor with friendly insults, calling



Fibber proposes on bended knee to Molly before they leave on their second honeymoon. **HERE WE GO AGAIN** (RKO, 1942).

him "bone-bender - hem-stitcher - tummy thumper - epidemic-chaser - and serum-salesman." He even went so far as to call Doc Gamble, "the mortician's friend." Fibber further heckled the physician by telling him that he would have trouble diagnosing a large cinder in a small eye. A typical greeting to the doctor might run:

"Hiyah, Arrowsmith. Kick your case of corn-cures in the corner and compose your corpulent corpus on a convenient camp chair."

Fibber never passed up an opportunity to needle the doctor about his ample weight, often referring to him as "Fatso." The insults flew back and forth like ping-pong balls.

Often, while visiting at 79 Wistful Vista, Doc Gamble would receive phone calls from one of his more demanding patients, one Mrs. Kladderhatch, informing him of all of her family's latest ailments. At such times Molly would lament:

"Oh, her, again!"

Doc Gamble often mentioned his nurse, Miss Ogilvie, as well as one of his girlfriends, Cuddles Cuddleson.

The protuberant physician enjoyed a warm and pleasant relationship with Mrs. McGee, and even though he tangled interminably with the man of the house, and addressed him in such questionable terms of "endearment" as "Neanderthal," "Marblehead," and "Gutter-nose," the verbally dueling duo remained the best of friends. The mediocre medic continued his practice in Wistful Vista and maintained his ritualistic rivalry with Fibber right up through the mid-fifties.

## "Here We Go Again"

On October 9, 1942, RKO Pictures released their second feature film with the Jordans, "Here We Go Again." Produce and directed by Allan Dwan. Screenplay by Paul Gerard Smith and Joe Bigelow, with special material for the Jordans furnished by Don Quinn. Hodge-podge plot found the McGees celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary at an expensive resort hotel which they could ill afford. Other guests included Hal (Gildersleeve) Peary, Isabel (Mrs. Uppington) Randolph and Bill (Wallace Wimple) Thompson. Also old pals, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Bergen was on a scientific expedition in search of a rare silk worm moth to aid the war effort. The McGees encountered Molly's old beau, Otis (Gale Gordon) Cadwallader, depicted as a wheeler-dealer promoting a formula for synthetic gasoline which was completely



Molly and Fibber plan their second honeymoon and its obvious that Fibber would like to sail for the Hawaiian islands. HERE WE GO AGAIN (1942)

worthless. The formula had been accidentally discovered by Wallace Wimple. Fibber, who was badly in need of some cash to pay his hotel bill, and let himself be conned into borrowing \$25,000 from Bergen to invest in Wimple's gasoline formula. Meanwhile, Bergen and Charlie, disguised as a squaw and her papoose, entered a restricted Indian reservation on the trail of the elusive moth. When they finally caught one, they learned, much to their dismay that the strands of silk were much too brittle for any practical use. However, some of Wimple's synthetic gasoline got spilled on the silk and magically converted it into a usable and vital material. When Fibber learned of Otis' scheme, he tried to get his money back from him, but the cad stole McGee's horse, Lillian, and made his escape from the scene. Not to be outdone, McGee borrowed a wagon, unaware that it was loaded with TNT. The situation grew more preposterous by the second. But Fibber finally did get his money back, repaid Bergen, and had enough left over to pay his hotel bill, too--and all's well that ends well.

One critic was quite cryptic in his comments:

"... Nothing more than a series of skits and songs and assorted comic grotesque figures taking their turn before the camera with equal lack of effect. Fibber McGee and Molly are seen as a couple taking a second honeymoon at a luxury lodge much beyond their humble purse. They are not shown to best advantage. Their home-spun sallies might sound amusing in the kitchen, or on a rural front porch, but not in a movie theater ... None of the radio stars are as funny on the screen as they are over the air ..."

The film premiered in New York City at the famed Palace Theater as half of a double feature bill and managed to make a good showing at the box office.

By the end of the 1942 season, the McGee program had become Number One in the Crosley rating with 36.5. Their estimated audience was 30,000,000 listeners every week. The program continued to dominate the rating through the mid-forties despite the fact that their \$24,000 weekly budget was less than half of most other top comedy shows.

On January 30, 1943, the four major networks combined forces to air a special salute to the country's leader by presenting "America Salutes President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Birthday." Jim and Marian performed a short skit as part of the salute. On April 13th, Claudette Colbert made a brief guest appearance on the McGee show in a plea for listeners to buy War Bonds.



At a break during a rehearsal for the radio program, Jim Jordan, Marian Jordan, Arthur Q. Bryan and Marlin Hurt (who played 'Beulah' the maid).

## Someone's in the Kitchen

During their many years of top popularity, little or no explanation was ever offered as to just how the whimsical couple from Wistful Vista managed to make ends meet. Fibber was never known to hold any kind of permanent job, nor was there nary a mention of his bringing home a paycheck, or any other source of income. However, for some inexplicable reason, and most likely just for the sheer fun of it, the plain-folks McGees did manage, at times, to employ a housemaid--and most unusual maids they were!

On the program for January 25, 1944, the Toops' maid Beulah, was heard for the first time. A few weeks later, Beulah was back, but this time she was in the employ of the McGee household. The role was created and played by a very versatile actor with a remarkable set of vocal cords--Mr. Marlin Hurt. Studio audiences were practically knocked off their seats when the handsome actor stepped up to the microphone and drawled in his best "Beulah" voice:

"Somebody bawlin' for Beulah?"

The fun-loving maid always chuckled hardily at Fibber's most feeble jokes and literally shook with mirth as she wailed:

"LOVE that man!"

Beulah became an immediate favorite with listeners. In July of 1945, actor Hurt was signed to star in his own BEULAH series for the CBS network. This marked the second spin-off to emerge from the McGee program.

After Beulah's departure Molly managed to take care of things quite nicely all by herself until February 11, 1947, when another "maid" was introduced on the show. The new maid was equally as unique as Beulah. Her name was "Lena," and the part was played by another actor, Mr. Gene Carroll. Carroll had begun his professional career in vaudeville back in 1914 in a comedy act in which he impersonated a spinsterish school teacher. He later teamed with singer Glenn Rowell, and the pair starred on the radio series, "Jake and Lena." Carroll had the rare distinction of playing both title roles--a zany old couple who ran a boarding house where Glenn lived and spent much of his time singing and playing the piano. When the musical team split up, Carroll brought his unique characterization of "Lena" to the McGee household and was a consistent laugh-getter through May 13, 1947.



HEAVENLY DAYS (RKO, 1944). The smiling McGees as they depart for the nation's capitol, little suspecting what misadventures await them.

## Breezing Along

By 1944 the McGee program was being carried by 133 NBC stations and affiliates. For the first time in his long career, Jim missed a broadcast on March 28th because he was confined to St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica with pneumonia. Marian did not appear that week either, but other cast members carried on. There was a special visit from Hal Peary as Gildersleeve, accompanied by his bratty nephew LeRoy, played by Walter Tetley. Jim was sufficiently recovered to return to the program the following week. Back on January 10, 1943 Fibber and Molly had paid an on-the-air visit to Gildersleeve on his program where he was the Water Commissioner of Summerfield.

On June 6th, the Jordans took part in a special NBC network broadcast marking D-Day, the Invasion of France. That night they turned their own program over to Billy Mills and the King's Men for thirty minutes of patriotic music, celebrating the Allied advance. On June 13th the Jordans participated in a broadcast for the 5th War Loan Drive. They also transcribed two programs for the "Parade of Stars" series, to be aired later in the season on September 19th and October 3rd.

Marian and Jim spent their fifteen-week 1944 summer vacation on their cattle ranch in Bakersfield. When their program returned to the air on October 10th, it was reaching the peak of its popularity. Radio Daily conducted its eighth annual "All-American Radio Program" poll in 1944 to select listeners' favorite shows. Winning first place in the "Comedy Team" category that year was FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY.

On November 7, 1944 the Jordans by-passed their regular weekly broadcast so that the network could carry complete presidential election returns. On November 28th the McGee program emanated from the Navy Pier in Chicago before an audience made up of enlisted men stationed there. Bill Thompson who was then serving in the Navy, and stationed in Chicago, took part in the show reprising his whimsical Wallace Wimple and Old Timer voices.

During 1944 the Jordans had completed their third and final film for RKO Pictures. The title, "Heavenly Days," was derived from Molly's famous expression. The film's director, Howard Estabrook co-authored the screenplay along with Don Quinn. This one-time writing team was obviously influenced by Frank Capra's classic film, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, about an average American citizen. The plot found Fibber being chosen "Mr.



The Wistful Vista Gang in a publicity pose at NBC, Hollywood. Left to right are Frank Pittman, Bea Benaderet, Gale Gordon, Jim Jordan, Harlow Wilcox, Marian Jordan, Phil Leslie, Billy Mills, Don Quinn, Shirley Mitchell and Arthur Q. Bryan.

Average Man" and, during a visit to the nation's capitol, delivering an address to Congress on the subject "What the man-in-the-street really wants." The harmless yarn was judged "too political" in some factions. Under the controversial Soldier's Vote Law which had been passed by the Senate in December of 1943, the film was declared "unfit for showing at army camps." This unfair classification placed it in the same category as the biographical epic film, "Wilson."

However, a reviewer for the New York Sun quipped:

"HEAVENLY DAYS is about as political as the funnies!"

It is interesting to note that the Soldier's Voting Bill was denounced by President Roosevelt as "a fraud perpetrated on the soldiers and sailors and marines . . . and on the American people."

"Heavenly Days" was released nationally on August 13, 1944. It was not very successful at the box office as audiences much preferred to have Fibber remain a comedian rather than be depicted as a serious-minded champion of causes of the little man.

On the broadcast of March 6, 1945, another new character was introduced--Mrs. Millicent Carstairs, played by Bea Benaderet. The well-remembered actress had been heard on the program as early as February 14, 1939 when she played the role of Miss Tadwell.

Mrs. Carstairs and her socialite husband hob-nobbed with the elite set of Wistful Vista on the "exclusive North Shore of Dugan's Lake." They raised navel oranges in their back yard, but in order not to sound vulgar, uppity Mrs. Carstairs referred to their crop as "Citrus-Umbilicus." She boasted of being a member of the "Granddaughters of the Puritans." Fibber referred to her as "Car-sty," which greatly distressed her. He once summed up her gaudy appearance quite neatly by calling her "The Rhinestone Rhinoceros."

Mrs. Carstairs was musically inclined and boasted of playing, not only the trombone, but also the accordian, as well as bagpipes. Much to McGee's chagrin, she also excelled on the mandolin. Millicent once divulged the fact that she had played trumpet in a jazz band, and not to overlook the fact that she had also slung hash in a Greek restaurant.

Unlike Mrs. Uppington, the magniloquent Millicent quite often got the upper hand over Mr. McGee. She traded him insult for insult and sometimes even outdid him in the tall-tale telling department, as well. The jocular jabs came fast and furious. When the program began its new fall season in 1945, the character of Mrs. Carstairs was absent, and in her place, Miss Benaderet was heard as Elsie Merkel, a wise-cracking beauty shoppe operator who



Jimmy Durante and Elvia Allman share a laugh during rehearsal for a broadcast. Durante made a single guest appearance with the McGees in 1952. Miss Allman appeared many times from 1939 through 1955.

referred to her place of business as "The Wistful Vista Beauty Saloon."

Miss Benaderet left the show's cast temporarily after the broadcast of December 21, 1946, for health reasons. She and her husband, actor/announcer Jim Bannon were expecting a child. She suffered a fractured pelvis in a fall, and the baby, a girl, was born prematurely. During the time between the accident and the birth of her child, Bea's hair reportedly changed from its natural jet-black to pure white. She returned to the McGee program on April 29, 1947 and was heard in the role of Thelma Graham, Molly's wise-cracking school chum from Peoria. On May 20, 1947, Miss Benaderet was back on the show again, in the role of a Tax Assessor named Miss Cartwright. On February 22, 1949, she returned as a cast regular once again and was heard as a fast-talking matron known only as "Thelma's sister." During each appearance, as the character rattled addledly on, she would pause momentarily to ask:

"Do you know Thelma?"

In January 1950, Elvia Allman introduced a new character, Mrs. Albert Clammer, yet another member of the Wistful Vista elite set. Not a great deal is known of Mrs. Clammer's veiled background, except the revealing fact that she had once worked as a dance-hall hostess. It was also revealed that, sometime in April of 1938, her husband Albert went out for some cigars--and never returned. Later she received a postcard from him postmarked South America and stating:

"Sorry--I got on the wrong street car. Love, Albert."

Miss Allman had been heard on the program as early as April 4, 1939 when she played a saleslady. The stern-voiced actress returned frequently in roles such as Mayor LaTrivia's secretary Miss Himmler. In 1950 she was heard once again as the Mayor's secretary, but was re-named, Miss Gimlet. At other times she portrayed Miss Longfeather who was private secretary to Molly's Aunt Sarah Driscoll. Miss Allman was also heard as "Mrs. Heinz of 57 Varieties Avenue," as well as the paging voice heard over the loudspeakers at the Bon Ton Department Store. She played Miss Rhoda Dendron, the President of the Wistful Vista Peony and Petunia Club, and was also heard as bossy Nurse Murphy, as well as Lt. Gordon, a WAAC Recruiter. Her other roles included society matron, Mrs. Fetlock of the Wistful Vista horsey set, and as Molly's amiable chum, Angelica Dennison.

On April 4, 1945 Variety carried a listing of Estimated Weekly Network Program Costs for the Year 1945. Although the McGee program was rated among the top favorite comedy programs, its



The Wistful Vista Family at NBC in 1941: left to right are The King's Men, Ken Darby, Rad Robinson, Jon Dodson, and Budd Linn, followed by Maestro Billy Mills, Fibber McGee and Molly, Hal Peary, Bill Thompson, Isabel Randolph and Harlow Wilcox.

weekly production costs, including salaries for actors, musicians, writers and director, as well as overall production costs (excluding fees for air time) were estimated at \$10,000. This figure was quite modest when compared to the \$22,500 weekly costs for the Jack Benny program. Fibber McGee and Molly program costs were half of the estimated \$19,000 spent weekly for the Bob Hope Show and were even less than the \$17,000 weekly budget for the Abbott and Costello radio program. Other shows which exceeded the McGee show production costs were: Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, estimated at \$13,500 and Burns and Allen at \$12,000. Duffy's Tavern had an estimated weekly cost of \$11,000 while Amos 'n Andy cost an estimated \$10,500. The McGee show was a definite bargain.

A major factor contributing to the low budget was the fact that the McGee show had only one main writer, Don Quinn assisted by Phil Leslie, while other shows such as Benny's had as many as a half dozen, or more, chief writers. Like most of the other top shows, the McGee program used a full orchestra and featured a supporting cast utilizing some of the finest talent available.

On January 17, 1945 Ben Gross wrote in his column:

"Tuesday is a rare evening for dialers with a preference for laughs. For the two comedy leaders of all surveys, Fibber McGee and Molly (NBC 9:30 p.m.) and Bob Hope (NBC 10:00 p.m.) follow each other. They, however, reflect a peculiar quirk of listeners' tastes. Hope's brash, breezy monologues contrast sharply with the pure corn of the McGees' hokum. These two shows are neck-and-neck in the polls, running consistently 1-2 in the ratings, yet they are as far apart as the poles in their respective styles.

## On the Home Front

The entire world was stunned when President Franklin D. Roosevelt died suddenly at Warm Springs, Georgia of a massive cerebral hemorrhage on April 12, 1945. The heart of the nation stood still in shock and grief. On Sunday, April 15th, the late president was buried in the rose garden of the house where he had been born at Hyde Park, New York. That evening NBC aired "Hollywood Salutes F.D.R.." a two-hour program of the late President's favorite songs, hymns, and stories. The special program was arranged by NBC and the Motion Picture Producers Association. It was aired from the west coast between the hours of four and six



Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, Canada. A capacity crowd gathered to watch the first and only 'foreign' broadcast of the Fibber McGee and Molly program, as part of the 7th Canadian Victory Bond Drive. (October 31, 1945).

p.m., Pacific War Time. Included in the stellar line-up of top talent participating in the touching tribute were: Amos 'n Andy, Jack Benny, Bing Crosby, Fibber McGee and Molly, Bob Hope, Dinah Shore, and many others. RCA Victor recorded the show on a set of fourteen 78 rpm records, in a very limited edition. The record album was not released commercially, but complimentary copies were distributed to President Harry S. Truman, as well as members of his cabinet.

Marian and Jim's segment of the tribute concerned itself with having Mr. McGee explain the president's death to Teeny. Undoubtedly it was their most poignant performance.

In the spring of 1945, the Jordans were blessed with the birth of their first grandchild, when daughter Kay had a girl of her own. In real life, Marian and Jim shared the same solid family values as did their fictional counterparts, the McGee's. Those values were recognized by the Los Angeles Post of Catholic War Veterans who presented the Jordans with a citation for their many contributions to the broadcasting industry. The citation was read on the McGee broadcast of June 19, 1945:

"To the beloved FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY, of America's millions, in Recognition of their Successful Efforts to Lighten the Burden of the American People in a time of great ordeal, through Understanding and Clean Comedy, and in Acknowledgement of their Accomplishment of portraying the American Home through Gentle Humor, in True Dignity, as a Great Source of our National Strength."

Word reached the Jordans during their 1945 summer vacation of a certain "chain letter" that was circulating around the country. The letter read, in part:

"Please send a dime to Fibber McGee, Worcester, Massachusetts. Fibber will use the money to buy . Victory Bonds for 'G.I. Joe McGee' who recently got out of jail after being sentenced to two years for slapping a German prisoner."

Jim Jordan emphatically denounced the letter as a "hoax."

The summertime replacement for the McGee show was headed by Danish pianist/comedian, Victor Borge. When the McGees returned to their regular Tuesday night time slot on NBC on October 2nd, Gale Gordon was on hand once again to resume his role as Mayor LaTrivia. On October 30th, for the only time in the program's long air run, it was broadcast from outside the territorial United States. The only "foreign" broadcast originated from the Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, Canada. It was staged there in conjunction with the 9th Canadian Victory Loan Drive. 20,000 eager Canadian fans took advantage of the opportunity to see their



Reaching the peak of their popularity, the McGees celebrated their 10th anniversary on the air in April, 1945.

broadcasting favorites "in person" and filled the huge auditorium to capacity. Before returning to the west coast, the Jordans and their cast spent the next two weeks in New York City where the broadcasts of November 6th and 13th emanated from NBC's Radio City studios.

Marian and Jim answered the call to appear on a special Command Performance broadcast for servicemen and were heard in a variety program with Jerry Colonna, vocalist Frances Wayne, and blues singer, Ethel Waters. The Jordans took part in a special "Fibber" sketch in which comedienne Cass Daley played Fibber's music teacher.



Fibber settles back to enjoy a good cigar in Union Pacific Railroad's Vice President's private car enroute to Omaha (October, 1950).

## THE FORTIES

### Performing at Their Peak

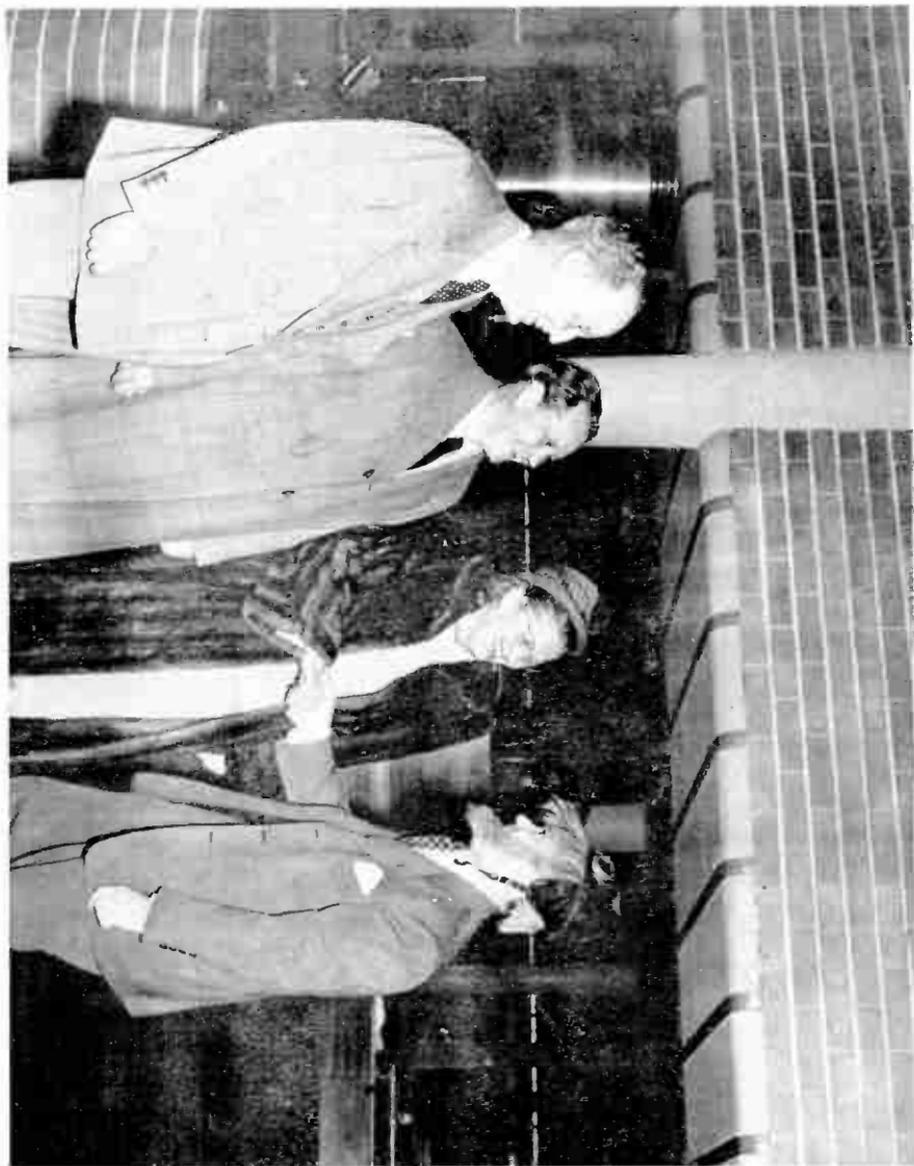
During the broadcast seasons of 1945/46, several cast changes took place and several different musical themes were experimented with. The character of Alice Darling was no longer heard after the broadcast of January 1, 1946. Bill Thompson returned to the program on January 15th and continued his portrayals of the "Old Timer" and Wallace Wimple, however, the characters of Boomer and Nick DePopolous, were seldom heard from again. On occasion, Thompson did try other new characterizations, such as "Roebuck," the snooty butler in the Carstairs home. In addition, he played various members of the Wistful Vista police force, most with names like Officer Mulhooney and Sgt. Clancy. All of Thompson's policemen characters always spoke with thick Irish brogues and handed Molly McGee such splendiferous bits of blarney as:

"Ah, Macushla, sure and your beautiful Irish eye-lashes are just like the shadows of lovely birds flying over the magnificent blue lakes of Killarney."

After his discharge from the service, the Jordan's son, Jim, decided to try for a show business career. He landed a few acting jobs, and even appeared as an actor on the McGee program of February 12, 1946. He then set out on a career as a motion picture producer and married actress Peggy Knudsen.

Jim, Sr. raised his clear tenor voice in a beautiful solo rendition of "Dear Old Girl," on the program of April 30th. During the 1946 summer vacation, Marian and Jim took a leisurely boat trip down the Current River in the Ozarks. The summer replacement program which began on June 11th, featured Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians. This same musical group also substituted for the McGee program on New Year's Eve of 1947 and during the next two summer vacation breaks.

For the 1946 season, a plot innovation found Doc Gamble and Mayor LaTrivia rivaling for the affections of flirtatious actress Fifi Treymayne. These two sterling citizens were mere putty in Fifi's well-manicured hands. She called LaTrivia "Chuckie," and for some odd reason, referred to Doc George Gamble as "Willie." Doc



Visiting the Johnson Wax factory in Racine, Wisconsin in November 1946, the Jordans met the company president for the first time. Mr. Samuel C. Johnson (far left), Jim, and Marian are greeted by 'The Old Timer' (Bill Thompson).

and the Mayor both tried to outdo each other in lavishing attention and gifts on the fickle Fifi. In order to impress her, LaTrivia went to call on her in a city fire engine. Not to be outdone, the good doctor went to visit her in an ambulance. Fibber was highly amused by the silly shenanigans and did everything he possibly could to add fuel to the flames and to further the feud over the fickle Fifi.

In honor of S.C. Johnson's 60th Anniversary, the November 5, 1946 program aired from Memorial Hall in Racine, Wisconsin. Seated in the audience were some 1,800 Johnson Wax Co. employees and guests. The previous day, Marian and Jim and the entire Wistful Vista gang, had paid an all-day visit to the Johnson Company's World Headquarters in Racine. They were personally received at Mr. Sam C. Johnson's office--to meet THE BOSS. The long-term relationship between the Jordans and their staff and the Johnson Company was a very amiable one.

The next spring Jim purchased a commercial tree nursery in Encino, as yet another of his many shrewd business investments. He soon discovered he had a green thumb and became an enthusiastic and successful horticulturist, along with Marian, who had raised and enjoyed making floral arrangements since her childhood days in Peoria.

During the post-war housing shortage, Marian and Jim decided they no longer needed their big home on Rancho Street in Encino, as both of their offspring had long since left the nest and set out on careers of their own. Jim had fallen in love with a modest five-room bungalow located on a beautiful hilltop on Belinda Street in Encino. The bungalow offered a breathtaking view of a hundred miles of the San Fernando Valley edged by the purple Sierra Madre Mountains. Marian was quick to agree that a smaller home would suit her just fine--after a few minor alterations: the addition of an extra bedroom, bath, den and ultra-modern kitchen. They sold their big home to the Carl Wester family.

Meanwhile, the alterations to the bungalow were taking much longer to complete than had been anticipated. Left without a roof of their own to cover their heads, Marian and Jim took refuge in a house trailer. Once the alterations were completed, Marian took care of the interior decorating while Jim landscaped the grounds with a four-level terraced rainbow of flowering plants including geranium, roses, bougainvilleas, petunias, fushias, and begonias. Marian also enjoyed gardening and was very proud of the blue ribbon prize she won for her cinerarias at the Pasadena Flower Show. Her indoor hobbies were collecting Dresden and Meissen figurines. She was an excellent cook and among Jim's top favorite



A 1950's portrait of Marian and Jim Jordan.

dishes, were her sugar cookies and beef stew.

Much of Jim's spare time was spent in his workshop, which he laughingly called "The Temple of Sawdust." The Jordans were true homebodies and rarely dined out. On occasion, members of the cast and a few close friends were invited to cookouts. They had one servant, a Filipino houseboy named Albert. For a long time, they had a pet Red Setter called "Mac," which was short for "McGee's Blue Mountain Boy." Their ranch at Woody, near Bakersfield, was called "Blue Mountain Ranch."

The years 1947/49 brought peak success to the Jordans and the Fibber McGee program. The broadcast of January 28, 1947 had been their 500th broadcast of the McGee show. As the result of a nationwide poll, the Radio Daily presented the Jordans with its "Most Popular Comedy Radio Program of the Year" award. On February 4th, Marian and Jim remained in the NBC studios after their regular Tuesday night broadcast was concluded to pay an on-the-air visit to their life-long friends Amos 'n Andy. Little is remembered of the performance together but the reunion of the Chicago quartet must have been a most warm and amusing affair. On February 10th, Marian and Jim were heard once again on the Screen Guild Theatre program on CBS, presenting a dramatization of their film, "Heavenly Days."

In June 1947, an Audience Response Analyst concluded that "a laugh occurred on the McGee program every 19.3 seconds." The show drew a high Hooper rating of 26.3 and was consistently Number One among the ratings. On October 30, 1947 Marian and Jim were heard on 'The Family Theatre' radio series.

Marian was ill with the flu on February 17th, 1948, and was not heard on the regular weekly broadcast. Three weeks later, on March 8th, the Jordans transcribed a condensed version of one of their earlier programs for the "Here's to Veterans" radio series. On March 13th, again via transcription, they paid a return visit to their old alma mater, Station WMAQ in Chicago, to participate in the station's 25th Anniversary celebration. Jim and Marian happily recalled their old SMACKOUT show and re-enacted a brief skit involving Luke Gray telling a tall tale to Teeny.

The popular pair from Peoria were in constant demand for guest spots. At that time in Hollywood, when gossip columnist Louella Parsons invited a star to appear on her radio program, it was not considered wise to turn her down. When she summoned the Jordans for a guest spot they naturally accepted, but with some trepidation. However, Don Quinn supplied the special script to be aired, and it was a drastic departure from the usual Parsons format. The script called for the columnist to begin the visit by knocking on



The cover of the Top Ten record album issued by Monitor Home Appliances in 1947. The album contained excerpts of radio broadcasts.

the McGees' front door at 79 Wistful Vista. Marian and Jim were not subjected to the usual grueling experience that most other stars were given. Their private lives were not pried into. Instead, as "Fibber and Molly," they merely chatted with the powerful Hollywood columnist in a very light manner. No secrets were solicited, nor were they pressed and probed for any personal information, as was the usual custom on the Parsons program. Quinn considered his clever handling of the delicate matter one of his major coups.

In September 1948, 20th Century Fox films released a motion picture short entitled, "Is Everybody Listening?" as a part of its March of Time film series. The McGee's were seen briefly along with other prominent radio personalities such as Fred Allen, Walter Winchell, Bergen and McCarthy, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, and Arturo Toscanini. Also that year, they appeared in another short film entitled: "NBC--A Salute to the Stars."

Directly after concluding their own program on November 18th, Fibber and Molly helped fill-in for their broadcasting neighbor on NBC, Bob Hope, who was absent on a trip to England. Eddie Cantor served as host of the Hope show and others making guest appearances that evening were Red Skelton, Amos 'n Andy, and Walter Winchell.

Also during 1947, Monitor Home Appliances distributed a special four-record album set of 78 rpm recordings, consisting of excerpts from previously aired McGee broadcasts. Appearing with the Jordans on this Top Ten Album #7, were Wistful Vista favorites Bill Thompson, Harlow Wilcox, Arthur Q. Bryan, Gale Gordon, and the Billy Mills Orchestra.

On October 30, 1947, Marian and Jim were heard on the "Family Theatre" program, starring as "Fibber and Molly" in an episode entitled "Advice to the Lovelorn," in which they helped a young couple get back together. Also in the cast were Jess Kirkpatrick, Betty White, and Tyler McVey. Don DeFore was the program's host and the script was by Phil Leslie.

On April 14, 1948, Marian and Jim were guests on Bing Crosby's "Philco Radio Time" program. Don Quinn supplied some witty chatter for them, and they harmonized along with Bing on "I Had a Dream Dear." It was the last time that they would be heard singing together over the airwaves.



Marian cuts her 50th birthday cake at the reception and birthday party following Honorary Law Degrees at Collegville, Indiana (April 15, 1948).

## Doctors of Law

April 15, 1948 was Marian's 50th birthday and was also a very special occasion for other reasons. On that date, she and Jim were presented with Honorary Doctor of Law Degrees by St. Joseph's College in Collegeville, Indiana. The degrees were presented as the result of a Radio Acceptance Poll conducted by Catholic colleges throughout the United States. Marian and Jim were met at the Dearborn station in Chicago by a banner-waving delegation of one hundred enthusiastic college men. Policemen from Illinois and Indiana escorted the honored guests to the St. Joseph's campus where they arrived at four in the afternoon. The band struck up "Happy Birthday to You" for Marian, and the ceremonies began with welcoming addresses by the college president and student chairman of the National Federation of Catholic College Students Press Commission, which had conducted the nationwide poll, of which Marian and Jim were the overwhelming winners.

Hundreds of spectators packed the college theatre to pay honor to the pair and to participate in one of the most beautiful tributes ever paid to theatrical folk. The ceremonies were tinged with solemnity, academic pageantry and cordial gaiety. The dean, Rev. Father Walter Pax, read the Citation:

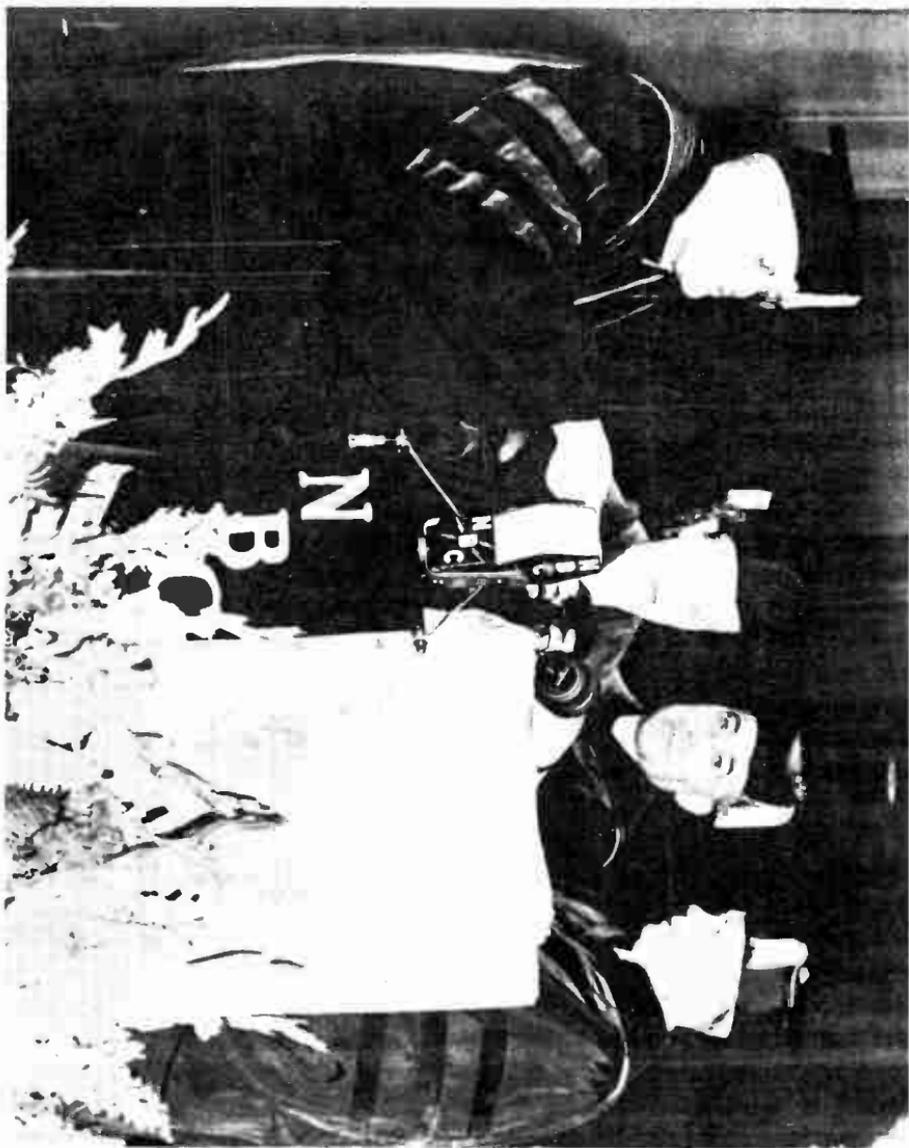
**"FOR DOCTORS JAMES AND MARIAN JORDAN:**

Saint Joseph's College sends cordial greetings to all who shall read these presents.

What we have enacted in the name of St. Joseph's College we now hereby make known.

As folklore is treasured and as folksong is loved; so too is that kindly humor that springs from homely atmosphere and experience esteemed as a precious jewel of the human spirit. For 'Humor' implies a sure conception of the beautiful, the majestic and the true, by whose light it surveys and shapes their opposites. It is an humane influence softening with mirth, the rugged inequalities of existence, prompting tolerant views of life, bridging over the spaces which separate the lofty from the lowly, the great from the humble. Mirth and merriment bars a thousand harms and lengthens life, and brings a quickening of zest and a glow of well-being.

It is fitting indeed to pay tribute to those who by their extraordinary talents contribute to the well-being of society and who strive to promote good feeling among their fellow men. More particularly is it proper to honor those whose contribution to the art of entertainment has been so wholesome, so full-hearted, so appealing as to merit the praises of millions. 'The manner of



Accepting Honorary Doctors of Law Degrees at St. Joseph's College, April 15, 1948. Bishop Bennett (left) and Father Lucks between the Jordans.

jesting,' says Cicero, 'ought not to be extravagant or immoderate, but refined and witty. There are, generally speaking, two sorts of jests: the one, coarse, rude, vicious, indecent; the other, polite, refined, clever, witty. The second, if well-timed, is becoming to the most dignified person; the other, is unfit for any gentleman.' And Quintillian has said: 'That laughter costs too much which is purchased by the sacrifice of decency and propriety.'

We declare that those whom we honor this day are true exponents of the Law of Charity in that the coarse and the rude find no place in their entertainment; of the Law of Good Taste, in that the vicious, the improper, and the indecent are likewise absent; of the Law of Morality in that decency, cleanliness, wholesomeness, propriety, refinement characterize their offerings.

WHEREFORE, Saint Joseph's College, wishing to express approval of the simple and natural artistry of JAMES JORDAN AND MARIAN JORDAN, his esteemed spouse, and at the same time to honor them for the high ideals of which they give evidence in their public life as well as in their private kingdom; and wishing to serve as spokesman for the forty millions of people for whom their kindly humor is a weekly surcease from toil and worry; as well as desiring to commend them for their truly Christian Philosophy of Life and for the acceptability of their public performances, on both stage and radio, to all classes and ages of persons, confers upon them the highest honor within its power to grant, the degree

DOCTOR OF LAWS, honoris causa.

And we beg the Giver of all good gifts to continue to bless them with Christian courage and with those homely virtues which have endeared them to such a multitude of their fellowmen.

Done at Collegeville on the Fifteenth Day of April in the Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Forty Eight, and of the College, the Fifty-seventh."

Marian and Jim accepted their Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees with humility and sincere appreciation and pledged a continuation of the same kind of entertainment that had made them famous for their good taste. The auspicious occasion was widely covered by the Paramount Newsreel and the Associated Press. Later that evening, the Very Rev. Harry A. Lucke, President of St. Joseph's College, read the citation over the air in a special NBC broadcast.

To add further to their honors, on the broadcast of May 4, 1948, Dr. E.C. Farnum, spokesman for the International Council of Religious Education, representing forty religious denominations, presented the Jordans with a citation in recognition of their contribution to entertainment commending:



Marian and Jim at home in Encino (April, 1952).

"... moral tone, a high type of humor, demonstrating democracy in living, a sponsoring commercial in keeping with the best in family life, and which best exemplifies certain qualities in American family life, and an adherence to standards in good taste in radio ..."

The Jordans rounded out their broadcasting year on December 16th by making a guest appearance with Dorothy Lamour on her "Sealtest Variety Theater" program.

Sometime during the year 1948, their daughter Kay went back to the west coast to live. Marian and Jim naturally wanted her to stay with them. They inquired about the possibility of repurchasing their former large home on Rancho Road. Luckily, they were able to do so. In the minds of their friends and much of the public, the house had continued to be referred to as "the Jordan house." Even the new occupants had never really felt that it belonged to anyone other than Marian and Jim. It was especially for that reason that the Wester family sold the home back to the Jordans. Along with Kay, and with much joy, they moved back in and spent many more cherished years there.

## **The Sale of "Fibber McGee and Molly"**

From the time in 1935 when Don Quinn had first begun writing the program, the name "Fibber McGee and Molly" had been the exclusive property of the Jordans. In 1947 CBS launched a talent raid in an attempt to lure many of the 'rivaling networks' top talent. Marian and Jim had been among the first to have been approached with an offer from CBS, but they steadfastly maintained their loyalty to their home network, NBC. In order to increase their earning power, Jim entered into a deal with NBC, whereby he sold the network the rights to the name "Fibber McGee and Molly," along with the program's concept and literary rights, for an undisclosed amount, believed to have been two million dollars. At the time of the sale, Don Quinn was signed by NBC to an exclusive seven-year contract.

On February 13, 1949, Marian and Jim made a rare departure from their Fibber and Molly roles, when they gave outstanding dramatic performances on the "Suspense" program in an episode entitled, "Back Seat Driver." It was a tense tale about a middle-aged married couple returning home from a late night movie. After driving out of the dark theatre parking lot, the pair discovered a man hiding in the back seat of their car. A newscast on the car radio



quickly led them to believe that the man was a suspected killer. The unwanted passenger forced them to drive to their home, terrorizing them every inch of the way. But the clever pair managed to outsmart him. The surprise ending revealed Jim as a plain-clothes detective. Coincidentally, Harlow Wilcox was the announcer for the "Suspense" program at the time of their appearance. The same script was rebroadcast on February 22, 1951 with Marian and Jim repeating the roles.

On April 17, 1949 they took part in Mutual's 'Triumphant Hour Easter Broadcast' from New York. The pair in a departure from their traditional roles, served as readers of a religious ceremony.

During the spring season of 1949, several new characters were introduced on the McGee program. On April 5th, Bud Stephen was heard in the role of druggist Kramer's nephew, Milton. Milton worked at the drugstore as a soda jerk and delivery boy and managed to get involved in some of the comedy highjinks. The character was heard throughout the remaining programs of the spring season.

On February 15th, Richard LeGrand began his role as Ole Swensen. On his first appearance, Ole was the janitor at City Hall, but when next heard from, he had switched jobs and was the janitor of the Wistful Vista Elk's Club. He had a famous catchline:

"I'm yust donatin' my time."

Ole spoke of his large family and once referred to Doc Gamble as "a great kidder - he delivered me all my kids!"

The Swensen offspring included Lars and Nels and Sven and Kristina. Shortly after the birth of Princess Jasmin to actress Rita Hayworth and her husband, Prince Aly Khan, on December 27, 1950 the Swensen's added yet another daughter and called her "Yasmin."

Beginning December 20, 1949, Herb Vigran was heard as Herbert Appel, a screwball type who had a most unusual way of speaking. Herb usually ran his words together and took strange pauses while placing the accent on all of the wrong syllables, creating many odd-sounding words and names. For instance, in his own peculiar speech pattern, his name became "Herber Tappel."

The McGee program sustained an estimated 40,000,000 listeners each week during 1949. Radio Best Magazine conducted a nationwide poll to determine "Favorite Husband and Wife Comedy Team" heard on the air. Results were announced in the May issue with Fibber and Molly in third place - trailing behind Burns and Allen and Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard, but ahead of Jack Benny and Mary Livingston.

For their summer vacation that year, the Jordans journeyed to



It was Cliff (Charlie Weaver) Arquette who first performed the Old Timer's role on the McGee program in 1936. Bill Thompson took over the role when he joined the show. Arquette returned to the program in 1949 and continued in various supporting roles.

Ireland where they enjoyed their anonymity, as the McGee program was totally unknown to the local gentry there. The summer replacement show was headlined by the King's Men and was titled, "King for a Night." Ken Darby served as spokesman for "Castle Car-Nu." Each week the program featured a guest "King" or "Queen." Among them: Dan Dailey, Hoagie Carmichael, Bob Crosby, Buddy Clark, Johnny Mercer, Margaret Whiting, Jo Stafford, Burl Ives. Andy Russell, Dorothy Kirsten, Martha Tilton, and Dick Haymes. Writer Phil Leslie was assisted by Arthur Jones while Harlow Wilcox and Ken Niles did the announcing.

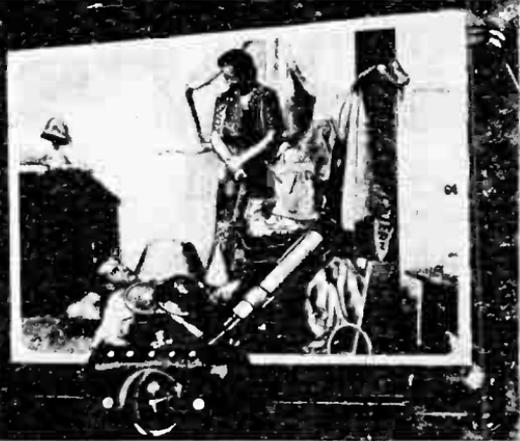
On Friday evening, September 16th, the NBC network presented a special full-hour broadcast saluting the 15th Anniversary of the "Fibber McGee and Molly" program. Cast regulars Wallace Wimple, the Old Timer, Ole, Mayor LaTrivia and Doc Gamble all participated, and special appearances were also made by previous cast regulars Hal Peary as Gildersleeve, and singer Perry Como. Other special guest stars on the program were: Dinah Shore, Robert Young, Phil Harris, Alice Faye, Irene Dunne, Dennis Day, William Bendix, and Bob Hope. To round out the festivities, the King's Men sang a medley of songs which had been sung by Marian and Jim in their early broadcasting days--"I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," "You Tell Me Your Dream," "Sally in Our Alley," and "Side by Side."

On September 22nd, Marian and Jim visited Perry Como on his Chesterfield Supper Club program. With the broadcast of November 1, 1949, Bill Thompson introduced his hilarious mumbling street car conductor character, and on November 8th, Cliff Arquette began a series of appearances in a most unusual role, that of Bessie, the Old Timer's girlfriend. Bessie was a talkative old gal who seldom allowed him to get a word in sideways. She even abbreviated the Old Timer's name to "O.T." Bessie told the McGees that she was one of a set of triplets and had a sister Essie, and a brother, Jessie. She claimed to be from the deep south and always departed with a cooing: "Goodbye, you-all."

After five appearances as Bessie, the character was dropped, but Arquette continued on the show as a cast regular and was heard as constantly changing characters with names such as: Waldo Cuffington - Mr. Fosdick - Fansworth Crandledance - Elrod Nutwinkle, III - Axelrod P. Baker (a butcher, whose mother's maiden name was Carpenter) - Daniel C. Offenbach - Leavenworth P. Eaton - Oliver J. Bostwick - Marvin Dopplegong - Courtneigh J. Gleep - Melvin J. Kankannon - Orville Pugsley - and other assorted odd characters named: Freeling - MacDonald - McIntyre - McSnead - Prentwhistle - Rasmussen - and Spofford.

Imagine Fibber McGehee and Molly...

on TELEVISION



brought to you by **N B C**

Yes, on NBC Television that crowded closet at Wasafal Vista—the babies of lovable Fibber and the trials of patient Molly, for instance—could all become real visual experiences . . . experiences for you to touch as well as hear.

Think what television programs originating in studios of the National Broadcasting Company . . . such programs as the top-notch sound radio which has won NBC the distinction of America's most popular network . . . will add to home entertainment!

Already, plans—within the limitations imposed by wartime—have been placed in operation by NBC plans which with the cooperation of business and government will result in extensive NBC tele-

vision networks . . . chains spreading from Eastern, Mid-Western and Western centers . . . gradually providing teleoperation after the war, to all of the nation.

Moderate-priced television receivers will present your home with sight and sound programs consistent with the highest standards of NBC . . . offer the most popular of the shows in this new, vastly improved field of entertainment. Look forward to other great NBC accomplishments such as FM, non-fee reception . . . faithfulness of tone reproduction.

Look to NBC to lead in the new fields of broadcasting by the same wide margin that you makes it *The Network Most People Listen to Most*.

**National Broadcasting Company**

America's No. 1 Network



A Service of Rm 110  
Incorporation of America

On February 20, 1950 during a visit to New Orleans, Marian and Jim were made Honorary Citizens of the famous city. Upon their arrival they were given the key to the city. In return, Fibber gave the mayor the key to his famous closet.

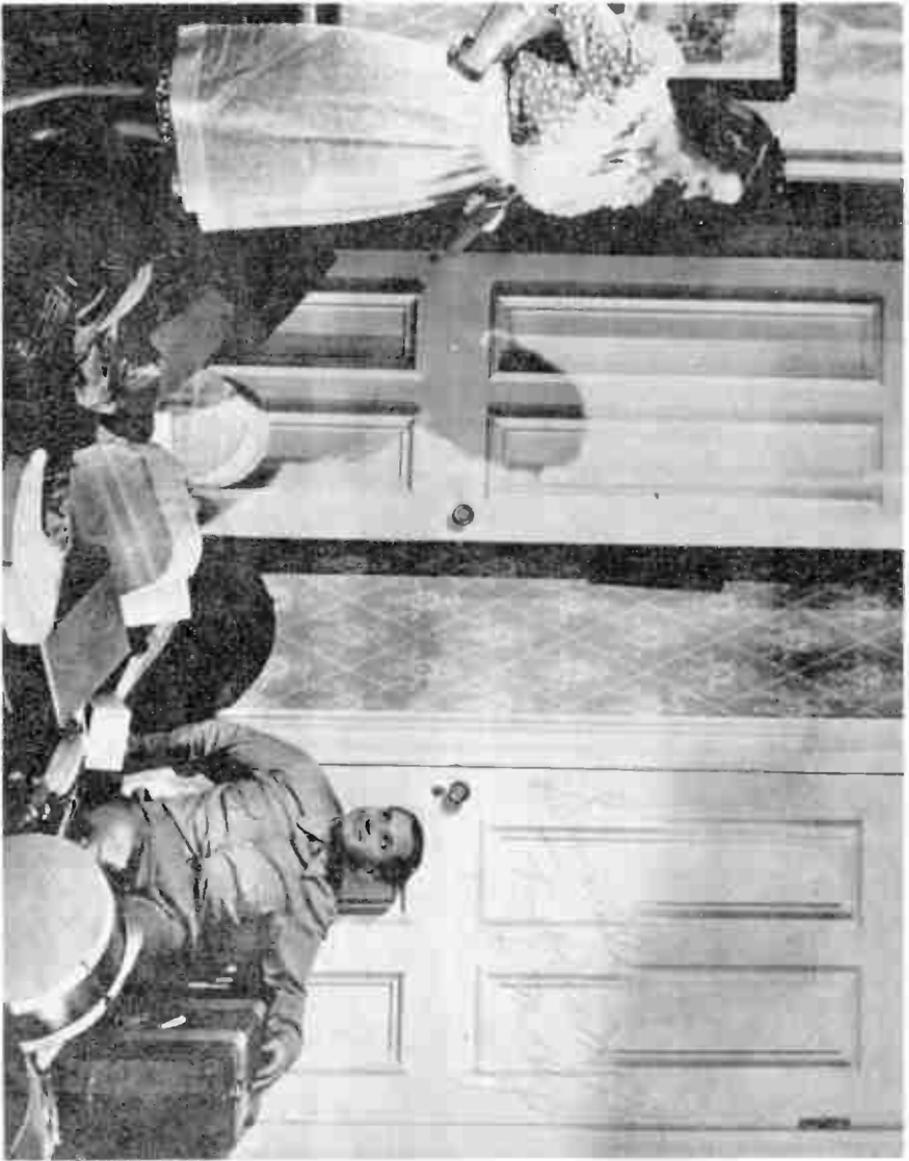
## TV - Or Not TV

One of the first telecasts originated from station WGY in Schenectady, New York on January 13, 1928 and was beamed into a few scattered homes in the nearby area.

On April 30, 1939 the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) teamed forces with the National Broadcasting Co. (NBC) to begin a continuous service of television programming in New York City. Throughout the summer of 1939, television was continually in the headlines--and at long last there was a general belief that television, as a whole, was ready to be taken out of the laboratory and given a fair trial as a means of public entertainment and enlightenment. However, commercial telecasting did not become a reality until July 1, 1941 with the licensing of the first two transmitters located in New York--NBC's Station WNBT and CBS's Station WCBW. Despite its staggering high cost television continued to grow in popularity as an entertainment medium until a shortage of vital materials caused by the start of World War II brought the new industry to a screeching halt.

When the wartime shortages ended, television prospered again and loomed as a very definite threat to the radio industry. Among the first types of television programs to become popular were comedy and variety format programs. Most comedians entering the new medium brought with them many years of training in vaudeville, burlesque, theater, and in some instances, radio. To maintain their stature and market value, it became necessary for many comedians to gain exposure on television. One by one the giants of American comedy braved facing the unblinking red eye of the television cameras. Some risked only an occasional guest appearance, while others, more daringly, tried programs of their own.

The first comedian to make it big in the new medium was Milton Berle. When the Texaco Star Theater first telecast on June 8, 1948, Milton Berle was the show's host, but was not considered the permanent emcee at the time. During the following months other comedians such as Harry Richman, Georgie Price, Henny



Moments after opening the hall closet door, Molly finds Fibber under a pile of his worldly possessions and about to utter "Gotta clean out that hall closet - one of these days." Scene from the 1944 RKO film HEAVENLY DAYS.

Youngman, Morey Amsterdam, Jack Carter and Peter Donald rotated in the host's spot. Berle became the show's permanent host in September--and it wasn't long before he was known to viewers as "Uncle Miltie" and "MR. TELEVISION."

Berle's success prompted other funnymen to follow. The next to give the new medium a try was Ed Wynn, a former vaudevillian who had entered radio on a regular basis in 1932 and was quite successful on the air for a dozen years. During 1950, Jackie Gleason, Eddie Cantor, and Burns and Allen joined the ranks of television comedians. In 1951 the long-time radio favorites Amos 'n Andy became a weekly TV series, but minus its creators and original stars. Bob Hope and Jack Benny moved into television in 1952, adding a visual dimension to their well-established radio formats. Red Skelton followed in 1953 and Jimmy Durante took the TV plunge in 1954. Fred Allen had made a brief attempt in 1950 as one of the rotating stars of the Colgate Comedy Hour, but threw in the towel after a few months. Allen with his wry wit once commented:

"Television is called a 'medium', because nothing on it is well done."

During 1954-56, Mr. Allen was a popular panelist on the television quiz show, What's My Line?

As Fibber and Molly were about to enter their 15th consecutive year of broadcasting for the Johnson Wax Company in 1949, the sponsor was getting anxious to switch its advertising dollars over to television. However, Jim and Marian were not at all sure that the new medium would be well-suited to them. They realized that essentially the success of their radio program had depended upon the listener's imagination. The key elements being the famous closet door gag and the very concept of Wistful Vista as 'Anywhere Middle America, U.S.A.', with its jumbled geography and the host of outlandish characters played by a mere handful of actors, all of which constituted a program uniquely suited to radio. A show that possibly could not, and most likely would not, lend itself to the revealing eye of the television camera.

Reluctantly the Jordans were persuaded to make a pilot film for a proposed television series of their popular radio series. Johnson Wax invested \$10,000 to shoot a half hour program at the Hal Roach studios in late March of 1950. The show took three days shooting time and considerable advance preparation. After being carefully edited, the producers attempted to introduce a new technique, that of dubbing in the laughter of a studio audience at special screenings. The show was filmed as a radio program with the cast gathered around microphones, reading from scripts.



Homebodies, Marian and Jim. Marian enjoyed gardening, while Jim tinkered in his workshop.

Appearing in the pilot with Marian and Jim were Bill Thompson, Gale Gordon, Arthur Q. Bryan, the Kings Men quartet and the Billy Mills orchestra, as well as announcer Harlow Wilcox. The Jordans complied with their sponsors request to make the pilot film for a television series, but they were determined to stay with radio.

In the spring of 1950 they made a return visit to their old hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Jim visited his childhood school (Norwood) and together, they went to St. John's church where they had first met at choir practice back in December 1915. Later they enjoyed an ice cream soda at Bill Duffer's drug store where they used to date as youngsters. Jim also addressed a capacity crowd at Bradley University's field house. They were followed around Peoria by photographers for Look magazine and the results appeared in the magazine in March.

On May 23, 1950 Marian Jordan was named 'Mother of the Year - 1950' by the Flowers-by-Wire Division of Western Union. During the year she also became a grandmother for a second time with the birth of a daughter, Janice, to son Jim, Jr. and his wife.

The habits of the American public were changing and by the end of 1950 television had overtaken radio as the medium enjoyed for total home entertainment, as 'the IMAGE' forged ahead of 'the WORD'.



Violinist Audrey Call was often featured in solos during the period when her husband Rico Marcelli was bandmaster of the McGee show. In this unusual photo she sits in at Don Quinn's typewriter, while he tries his hand with her violin.

## THE FIFTIES

### The Tide Ebbs

For the broadcast of April 11, 1950, the hands of the radio studio clock seemed to have been turned back a quarter-of-a-century and the McGees found themselves temporarily in charge of a general store once again, and the situation obviously caused Fibber to have a slight lapse of memory. At one point when the phone rang, he snatched it up, and instead of his usual chat with Myrt the operator, he sputtered:

"Hello, SMACKOUT - the store down on the crossroads of the air - Luke Gray speaking ..."

Fifteen happy years of continued sponsorship by Johnson's Wax terminated on May 23, 1950, when the company shifted its advertising dollars into sponsoring two television shows, 'Saturday Night Review' and the dramatic series, "Robert Montgomery Presents." When the McGee program returned to the air for another fall season on September 19th, it had a new sponsor--Pet Milk.

To begin to prepare their loyal audience for the acceptance of a new sponsor, on September 2nd the Jordans had made a guest appearance on the transcribed Mary Lee Taylor program sponsored by Pet Milk products. In addition, Marian made a solo return visit to the program the following week.

Sometime during the 1949 season, Don Quinn first made known his plans to give up the writing of the McGee program. Ending the long-time partnership with the Jordans had been a very difficult decision to make. The parting was an amiable one, with Marian and Jim wishing Don the greatest success with his new project. Quinn had created and was about to write a new radio comedy series, "The Halls of Ivy." It would be the continuing story of William Todhunter Hall, the distinguished president of Ivy College in the town of Ivy, U.S.A., and of his wife, the former Victoria Cromwell, who had been a leading actress on the British stage. These new ultra-sophisticated characters were a distinctive departure from the unassuming McGees of homey little Wistful Vista.



WorldRadioHistory

Writer Phil Leslie, Marian and Jim discuss the Community Chest Drive program to be aired from Omaha with publicity director of the Union Pacific Railroad (October, 1950).

Quinn's new series, "The Halls of Ivy," debuted on NBC radio on January 6, 1950, starring Ronald Coleman and his real-life wife, actress Benita Hume. In addition, Arthur Q. Bryan was heard in the role of Professor Warren. After a successful radio run of several years, the program became a television series on October 19, 1954 and continued through September 29, 1955.

Phil Leslie, who had been Don Quinn's writing assistant since 1943, assumed full writing responsibility for the McGee program. Out of loyalty to the Jordans, Quinn continued to serve as writer/consultant along with Leslie through the end of the 1951 spring season. Thereafter, Leslie's scripts continued to be funny, clever, and warmly human. He proved to be another "natural" in the amazingly long line-up of cast and staff who had been associated with the highly successful program throughout its many years on the air.

On October 18, 1950, Marian and Jim made a return guest appearance on the "Family Theatre" program in an episode entitled "The Windbag." They were heard as "D.J. Lattimer" and his wife, "Martha." Lattimer was a real estate agent in Clay Center, Kansas, who agreed to let a radio writer use his name. After the writer gained fame for his work, the real Lattimer began to tell windbag tales--quite similar to "Fibber McGee." Also heard in the cast were Verna Felton, Ruth Parrott, Howard Culver, Howard McNear, Michael Hayes, and Virginia Eiler. The host was John Ford and the script was written by Jack Mitchell.

There were an estimated 12 million television sets scattered throughout the country by the spring of 1951. On September 4th, NBC-TV began coast-to-coast telecasts via co-axial cable, with a network of sixty-one stations. On October 15th, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez debuted a modest little television show revolving around ordinary domestic problems of a young couple. That show was "I Love Lucy," and it became the most watched, most talked about, and most popular show in television history.

When the McGee program returned to the air for its new fall season on October 2, 1951, Phil Leslie's first solo script was used. It was an exceptionally good show and dealt with the problems McGee encountered while planning a trip to Omaha. Molly, who had been appointed president of the Wistful Vista Community Chest, had received an invitation to help with a big rally in Omaha. The comedy evolved from the fact that Fibber had invited several of their neighbors to make the trip to Omaha with them--all at the expense of Mayor LaTrivia. In reality, the entire cast did travel by train to Omaha for a special fund-raiser for the Community Chest.

Pet Milk continued sponsorship of the McGee program through



TV-RADIO LIFE (March 30, 1951).

June 10, 1952. When the show returned after a summer vacation on October 7, 1952, sponsorship was assumed by the Reynolds Aluminum Company, which carried the McGees for one season through June 30, 1953.

### 15 Minute Format

The Fibber McGee and Molly program returned to the air on Monday, October 5, 1953, but with an entirely new format. The program became a quarter-hour show aired five times weekly, Monday through Friday, from 7:00 to 7:15 p.m. P.S.T. Although the show had multi-sponsors, its budget was drastically reduced. Missing were such familiar names as Harlow Wilcox, Billy Mills' band, and the Kings Men quartet. Gone also were the studio audiences that had been such an intricate part of the program for eighteen years. The new announcer was John Wald. However, beginning with the broadcast for October 27th, Don Wilson was heard delivering the commercials for one of the new sponsors, Tums, on the Tuesday broadcast each week.

For the premiere of the new five-times-weekly, quarter-hour program, Wallace Wimple wrote a little poem:

"WELCOME to Mr. & Mrs. McGee  
Back again - on NBC;  
As I look ahead,  
It makes me shriek,  
What'll you do  
FIVE TIMES a week?"

The new cast of supporting players was reduced to just two of the old reliables, Arthur Q. Bryan as "Doc Gamble," and Bill Thompson as both the "Old Timer" and Wallace Wimple" Marian, of course, continued to be heard as Teeny. Other occasional supporting roles were played by talent such as Elvia Allman, Parley Baer, Ken Christy, William Conrad, Mary Jane Croft, Bob Easton, Marvin Miller, Shirley Mitchell, Howard McNear, and the Jordans' daughter-in-law, Peggy Knudsen. Others also heard were Tyler McVey, Herb Vigran, and Peter Votrian. Film star Pat O'Brien made a guest appearance on the broadcast of March 11, 1954 and TV personality John Cameron Swayze appeared as himself on December 6, 1954. The new routine of transcribing the



Chuckling over a new gag inserted during a rehearsal are the show's writers (left to right) Andy White, Don Quinn, and Phil Leslie.

quarter-hour shows permitted Marian to get a lot of needed rest, as her health remained delicate.

To assist with the writing for the new series, Phil Leslie hired Ralph Goodman, Leonard Levinson, and Joel Kane. Several important changes in story line were also inaugurated. The McGees were given some new neighbors, Les and Sally Nelson. A dial telephone was installed and they were given a new telephone number 4366. But it just didn't seem right without Fibber's conversations with Myrt. So, many times when he would use the phone he would dial the operator for assistance--and he and Myrt would have a little chat, as in days gone by.

Many of the old familiar topics from the half-hour series were resurrected and used in the new shorter format. Holiday celebrations, encounters with Teeny, Elks Club parties, duck hunting trips, and the usual get-rich-quick schemes that always backfired. These themes, as well as other familiar subjects, set the stage for Marian and Jim to perform at their best, despite the elimination of the live audience and orchestra.

A fine example of an old topic re-used was the hilarious eight-part series heard in November of 1953 involving yet another duck hunting trip to Lake Wapahoki. The weather refused to cooperate--it rained, and it poured, and not a duck was bagged by neither Doc Gamble, the Old Timer, nor McGee, himself. It proved to be one of the funniest of the fifteen-minute sets of shows. It was also unusual, in that, Molly only appeared in the first and last of the eight episodes.

During its more than eighteen-year run as a half-hour program, there had only been six different occasions when the McGee show had been "serialized" in the sense that two, or more succeeding shows continued the same story line. Beginning with the fall season of 1953, Phil Leslie changed that characteristic and frequently the story line was continued for as many as fourteen succeeding episodes.

The longest running serialized story line was aired in January of 1954, titled "The Citizen-X Contest." It consisted of fourteen consecutive episodes, during which Fibber searched frantically to learn the identity of "Citizen X," only to learn in the final episode that the mysterious party was none other than his closest companion--and best pal--MOLLY.

What may have been the funniest single episode of the entire quarter-hour series was aired on October 30, 1953--"Trick or Treating with Teeny." Fibber let himself be talked into taking the tenacious tyke around the neighborhood after dark, with the clear understanding that there would be no "tricking." The peculiar pair



Jim and Marian pose on the track platform of the Union Pacific Vice President's private car before departure to Omaha for the Community Chest Benefit in the Arksarben Auditorium (October 9, 1950).

got involved in some unplanned pranks, when they accidentally knocked over some very noisy garbage cans, pulled a squeaking gate off its creaking hinges, and accidentally made a lot of other things go bump in the night.

Phil Leslie has confided that his favorite, most heart-warming and cherished, quarter-hour script was the one he wrote for Christmas Eve 1953. The delightful episode found Fibber relating the story of "Laura, the Lop-Sided Pine" to his favorite audience of one--Teeny. For the following Christmas Eve program, Mr. Leslie wrote another charming holiday fable, "The Patient Little Star," which Fibber told to Teeny in a most affectionate manner.

The Jordans made only a few special guest appearances during the mid-50's. One of particular interest was on the program, "It Pays to be Married," on April 2, 1954.

NBC re-adjusted the broadcasting schedule of the McGee program and beginning the week of August 29, 1954, the show was aired daily Sunday through Thursday evenings. The Gillette Cavalcade of Sports boxing matches took over the Friday night time slot. The new schedule remained constant through Thursday, June 23rd, when the network granted the Jordans and Phil Leslie a three-month paid vacation, during which period re-runs of previously aired programs were re-broadcast. Marian and Jim spent the free time leisurely at their home in Encino and at their Blue Mountain Ranch.

The quarter-hour series of programs had multiple sponsors. The first three weeks had been sustained by the network before Tums began picking up the tab for Tuesday airings beginning October 27th. In mid-November, Paper-Mate Pens signed on to carry the Monday, Wednesday and Friday programs. Other sponsors who joined the line-up during the seasons of 1953 and 1954, were Richard Hudnut Home Permanents, RCA Appliances, Carters Little Liver Pills, and the Prudential Insurance Company. In 1955 Dial Soap, Armour and Company, Brown and Williamson, and Miles Laboratories (Alka Seltzer) were added. Finally, in 1956 as the program neared the end of its two-and-one-half year run, Brown and Williamson and Miles Laboratories carried most of the financial load.

Sunday night broadcasts were eliminated after June 19, 1955. Starting Monday, June 27th, the program was switched to a new daytime spot airing Monday through Friday at 8:45 a.m. PST. There were repeat broadcasts Monday through Thursday evenings at 7:00 p.m. However, the program was not heard on Friday evenings because sporting events were aired in that time slot. The Monday through Friday schedule continued through Friday, March



The last known cast/staff publicity photo mid-1950's. Left to right: Phil Leslie, Max Hutto (producer/director) Marian, Bill Thompson, Arthur Q. Bryan, Jim, John DiGrazzio (NBC Engineer), and unidentified man.

23, 1956, when the wistful visitations to Wistful Vista came to an end.

There had been a total of 577 quarter-hour programs. Of these, Mr. Leslie wrote seventy-three different sets of continuing story lines ranging from two to fourteen programs each. All of the other programs were single self-contained episodes, whose story stood on its own. The closet gag was only used eight times throughout the entire quarter-hour run. It was heard during 1954 on the programs for February 16th, July 1st, and December 13th and 23rd. During 1955 it was used again on May 16th and December 1st and 23rd. It was only heard once during 1956 on the show of February 15th.

The familiar friendly voices of Marian and Jim were sadly missed by their many loyal fans for the remainder of 1956. However, on Christmas Eve they did participate in a special holiday broadcast with Gregory Peck, aired over NBC. On that holiday show, Fibber once again told Teeny the story of "Laura, the Lop-Sided Pine."

### Weekend Monitor

June 1, 1957 was a heavenly day for Fibber McGee and Molly fans, for on that date their favorite couple began to make regular appearances each weekend as part of the long lineup of entertainers featured on NBC's "Weekend Monitor" show.

At its inception in June of 1955, "Weekend Monitor" had been aired for forty consecutive hours each weekend beginning at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning and continuing, non-stop, through midnight on Sunday. Sylvester "Pat" Weaver had conceived the innovative format and the show was hailed as a "Kaleidoscopic Fantasmagoria" of entertainment. Nothing like it had ever been attempted before, or since. In time, the forty-hour weekend broadcasts were shortened by eight hours, eliminating the Saturday midnight through 8:00 a.m. Sunday segment. The producer of the mammoth broadcast was Arnold Peyser, who turned it over to Mike Zeamer in September of 1958.

Fibber and Molly were heard in sketches timed to run between four and five minutes each, including time for a one-minute commercial. Five different spots were aired on the Saturday portion of "Weekend Monitor" and an additional five spots were heard on the Sunday portion. Each weekend called for a total of ten vignettes--or the equivalent of two half-hour programs.



Proud and happy grandparents. Marian and Jim with three of their grandchildren: Peggy and Janice, daughters of son Jim Jr., and Diane, offspring of daughter Kay.

The first five weeks of sketches were written by Messrs. Kahn, Carmen and Crutchen. Beginning July 6th, Tom Koch took over the writing of the sketches. In all, he wrote a total of 1,136 different spots. With the exception of a possible ten or twenty spots, all were recorded and aired. Koch also estimates that approximately 160 of the spots were repeated on re-broadcasts during 1960 and 1961.

For the "Monitor" sketches, Jim and Marian worked without benefit of a supporting cast, although Teeny was usually heard in one or two of the five segments aired each day. Occasionally, Doc Gamble or the Old Timer would be mentioned, but never heard. The sketches were recorded on the west coast and shipped to NBC in New York for airing.

JIM JORDAN: *"We recorded the vignettes and shipped 'em, by tape, to New York. We sold 'em like you sell eggs, I guess--by the crate! Cliff Thorsness worked on the sound effects with us down at the Radio Recorders Studio on Santa Monica Boulevard. Dick Davis was the fellow who produced the shows.*

*The man we dealt with at NBC was Al (Cappy) Capstaff. He was head of the radio department at NBC at that time. Cappy is the one who set up the deal with Tom Koch to write the Monitor shows for us."*

Tom Koch has recalled his association with the Jordans:

"I was born in 1925 in Charleston, Illinois, just a short piece down the road from the Jordans' home town of Peoria. I always thought that my midwestern background made more of a positive impression on Jim Jordan than any other credentials I might have had. I went straight from being a drug store delivery body to being a professional writer. In the spring of 1955 I was a writer on the last network TV show originating from Chicago - and it folded. The alternatives were - to leave town, or go into another line of work. I left town - for New York, hitting there just as the monumental job of assembling a staff for MONITOR was in progress; I latched on as one of the staff continuity writers and was a 'charter member' of the staff when MONITOR hit the air in June of 1955.

In October I was approached to do the ten weekly Bob and Ray comedy spots being aired by Monitor. The deal worked out fairly well, hence, when NBC lured FIBBER AND MOLLY out of retirement to do five-minute Monitor spots of their own, the Jordans dragged their feet on one obvious point: Where could they find a writer who could do the scripts within the limited budget provided?

At the recording sessions, Jim was still the perfectionist, though



The amiable homebodies, Jim and Marian wave a cordial greeting from the front door of their home.

the recording was done in a tiny booth in a small, independent recording studio. Marian seemed to regard the whole thing as more of a lark. Always, the feeling was that they weren't doing the show for the money. Jim was doing it out of pride in the character he had established. Marian was doing it just for fun.

Because of the program's rather formless format, features were not scheduled at any particular time. It would vary from week to week. This was why each spot had to stand on its own feet. One day's airing had to be five individual pieces because we couldn't figure on listeners hearing more than one. However, the five had a theme or continuity. Often Fibber would be preparing for something topical like Thanksgiving, National Bicycle Week, whatever. Each spot would recap that fact, and then go on to another facet of the topic. Hence, the ten spots each weekend actually were like two half-hour shows broken down into five pieces each. I'm not sure that there ever was another radio show done quite that way.

In writing the Monitor scripts I was only relying on what I had remembered of their radio show, having heard it as a kid. They had so many regular gimmicks like the Myrt telephone operator skit, the closet gag, Fred Nitney from Starved Rock, and the routines of Molly as the little girl. And the way Fibber spoke, it was always, 'I and Fred,' never 'Fred and I.' The program almost wrote itself, because I just kept using these regular patterns of gags. Monitor was a loose kind of show. It was flexible, it didn't matter if we ran a little over, or a little under ... I was paid \$7.50 for each three to five minute vignette - and the Jordans augmented this from their own pocket."

Tom Koch had written for the Jordans for over a year before he had an opportunity to meet them for the first time:

"At the time I was quite unused to meeting celebrities, especially the type who had been such big stars when I was a child. Being invited to the Jordan's mansion in Encino only heightened my trepidation about meeting them. You had to speak through a microphone at the gate to be admitted. I thought, 'Oh, boy, first time, and here I am in Hollywood!' Then I got inside their home and instantly I realized that they were just like the neighbors I had left in the midwest...hospitable, gracious and just plain 'down-to-earth!'..."

Many different firms sponsored the segments of Monitor on which the McGees were heard. In June of 1957, the first seventeen weekends of sketches were sponsored mainly by General Mills, who were promoting their Cheerios breakfast food product. Other sponsors who followed included: Pepsi Cola, Esther Williams



When "Fibber McGee and Molly" became a TV series in September, 1959 Bob Sweeny and Cathy Lewis were starred.

Swimming Pools, and Ligget and Meyers tobacco products. Most of the commercials were delivered by Fibber and Molly, themselves.

Marian and Jim were heard on Monitor for the last time on Sunday, September 6, 1959--just twenty-four years, four months, and nineteen days after they had debuted as "Fibber McGee and Molly." By a strange coincidence, the very last radio program employed a television theme entitled, "McGees as TV Stars," wherein Fibber imagined Molly and himself as TV news analysts, as well as the stars of a dramatic western series.

### Wistful Vista on Television

For a long time NBC had entertained the idea of producing a television series of Fibber McGee and Molly, but the Jordans had no interest in same. The network approached Phil Leslie to write a script for a pilot film, but he declined. NBC proceeded with their plans without Leslie and the original stars.

On Tuesday, September 15, 1959 at 8:30 p.m., NBC introduced its television version of the comic couple from Wistful Vista. Sponsorship of the show was shared by Singer Sewing Machines and Standard Brands. The series starred Bob Sweeney and Cathy Lewis. Sweeney had made several appearances on the McGee radio program during 1953 and seemed to be a good choice for the role of Fibber. Hal Peary was included in the television cast, but not as Gildersleeve. In a strange turnabout in roles, he was cast as Mayor LaTrivia, the role that had originally been created for the radio show as a substitute foil for Fibber when Gildersleeve departed for his own series. By another odd coincidence, when the Fibber McGee and Molly radio show became a five-times weekly program in October of 1953, it was followed on NBC each night by a quarter-hour version of "The Great Gildersleeve," with Willard Waterman in the starring role.

Also appearing in the television Fibber McGee series were Addison Richards as Doc Gamble, and young Barbara Beard as Teeny. The McGees were given some new neighbors for television, Roy and Hazel Norris, played by Paul Smith and Elizabeth Fraser.

The first episode dealt with Fibber setting out to buy a two-wheel golf cart and winding up instead with a new house trailer. The second episode was centered around McGee's boasts of his many contributions to the cultural life of the community. His Wistful



Jim and Marian spent much of their free time outdoors. Both enjoyed gardening and Marian was very proud of the Blue Ribbon prize she won for her cinerarias at the Pasadena Flower Show.

Vista neighbors were delighted when he announced plans for opening a "gallery", expecting it to be an "art gallery;" but what Fibber had in mind was a "shooting gallery" - and so it went.

While Sweeney and Lewis were outstanding performers in their own right, long-time fans of the radio program simply could not accept them in the all too familiar roles of Fibber and Molly. Production standards were high, but the TV series lacked the magic spark that had been provided by the Jordans and their excellent writers and supporting cast for so many years. The series was canceled after twenty-six weeks and has faded into obscurity.

### "Goodnight, All"

After her bout with serious illness in 1937, Marian's health remained quite fragile. She was not feeling well when she and Jim took a vacation trip to New York City in February of 1960. While in New York, the NBC network presented them with an offer to continue with the "Weekend Monitor" broadcasts for an additional three years. But Marian was feeling worse and consulted a physician. A thorough examination revealed the presence of a malignant ovarian tumor. The Jordans went back home and the contract offer was declined.

The following year was spent in quiet retirement. Marian's strength continued to wane. When she was able, she liked to putter in the garden with her beloved flowers. Jim, always the devoted husband, was ever close at hand, never any farther away than in his home workshop. The children also kept in close contact as the long days slipped quietly by.

On Friday morning, April 6, 1961, Marian complained of severe pain. The family was summoned to her bedside. A half-hour later she passed away peacefully. Rosary was recited at Our Lady of Grace Church in Encino on Sunday evening. Funeral services were conducted from the church the following morning at 10:00 a.m. and burial was made at Holy Cross Cemetery.

An endearing entertainment era ended with the passing of Marian Jordan. Beloved Molly would never again bid the weary world a warm and gentle -

"Goodnight, all."



Photo courtesy of S.C. Johnson and Son, Inc. (1972).

## McGEE'S LATER YEARS

### Not Quite Retired

Without Marian at his side, life didn't hold its usual joy for Jim. He no longer felt a compulsion to perform and made his last professional appearance on the "Tonight Show" with Jack Paar to formally announce his retirement from show business on July 31, 1961. Also appearing on the show that night was Paar's regular comic sidekick Cliff Arquette and old friend from the days of the McGee program.

Jim put show business behind him and sailed off to Hawaii on a long over-due vacation. The final months of Marian's illness had been very exhausting, both physically and emotionally. While relaxing on the tropical island, Jim met a fellow American tourist, Gretchen Stewart, the widow of dialect-comedian Harry Stewart. During the World War II years, Mr. Stewart gained fame for his comedy characterization of the heavily Swedish-accented, "Yogi Yorgenson." Marian and "Yogi" had worked together on a brief series of transcribed programs for the armed forces overseas.

As Jim became more relaxed, he regained his natural zest for life. He found he was beginning to spend a lot of time with Gretchen. During their cheerful conversations, they learned they had much in common. Upon their return home, the pair kept in close contact and a beautiful relationship resulted.

Jim and Gretchen returned to Honolulu in 1962 and were married there on January 31st and then toured the Orient for a honeymoon.

After his retirement from show business, Jim remained slightly active in real estate business. In 1967 he sold the large home in Encino and he and Gretchen moved into a smaller home remotely tucked away in Beverly Hills. After many years of living in the limelight, it was a welcomed relief to enjoy complete privacy. With Gretchen's devoted companionship, life was a joy once more.

Jim developed serious health problems, and in December of 1970 he underwent open heart surgery at the Hospital of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he had a mechanical valve implant. The plucky Peorian pulled through with flying colors and made a big hit with the hospital staff while recuperating. Upon his



Frank Bresee and Jim Jordan perform a Fibber McGee sketch at the Sportman's Lodge, Studio City, California (1980).

release from the hospital, he remarked with his old time wit:

"I now have a mechanical aortic valve ... I feel great!"

In the more than two decades since Marian Jordan passed away, the radio broadcasting industry has undergone many changes. The delightful radio comedies and thrilling dramas and adventures of yore have been traded in for the endless din of droning "telephone talk" shows, hard-sell announcers, and blaring broadcasts of rock music. But, happily, a Radio Renaissance has begun and several major attempts to re-establish new series of radio comedy and dramatic programs have been made. Two of the people responsible for this rekindling of interest in the old-time radio format are Frank Bresee of Hollywood and Chuck Schaden of Chicago. They were among the first to recognize the value and potential of re-broadcasting recordings of old radio shows that survived the rigors of time. Both men have broadcast their own versions of old-time radio shows.

Frank Bresee had been a child actor on radio and was heard on "The Major Hoople" series in 1942 as the Major's nephew, Alvin. Mr. Bresee launched his "Golden Days of Radio" series for AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Service). He began by airing excerpts of previous broadcasts and invited some of the actors and writers of these former shows to his program to reminisce.

Mr. Bresee had been a long-time friend of Jim Jordan, and in 1971 he invited the famed comedian to guest on his "Golden Days of Radio" program to be interviewed and to share anecdotes from those heavenly days. Excerpts from old McGee programs were also aired, and the friendly pair read a tongue-twisting alliteration taken from a vintage McGee script. Since that time, Mr. Jordan has shared similar retrospects on broadcasts aired on October 8, 1972, October 5, 1975, and August 29, 1976.

In Chicago, Mr. Schaden created two new radio series: "Those Were the Days," and "The Hall Closet." Both programs have been beamed throughout the midwestern region of the United States. In July of 1973, Mr. Schaden traveled to the west coast to interview Jim Jordan at his home. The interview was later aired on Schaden's, "The Hall Closet" program.

Through efforts such as these, and by members of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters and organizations such as SPERDVAC (Society to Preserve Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy) and THE FRIENDS OF OLD TIME RADIO headed by Jay Hickerson, Fibber McGee and Molly, and old-time radio in general, is being kept alive.

Although the 1960's were basically retirement years for Jim, he seemed destined to reassociate himself with the entertainment

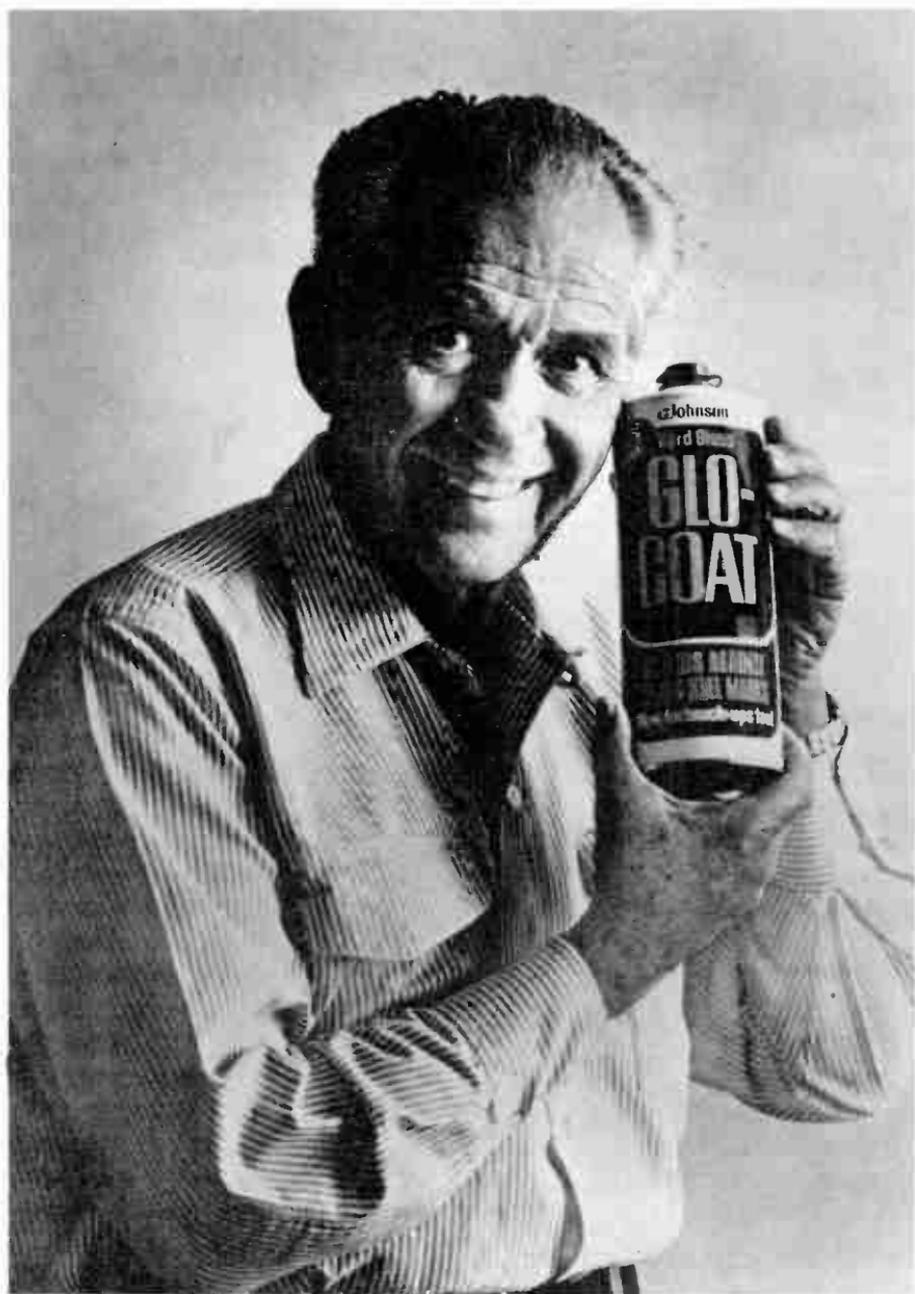


Photo courtesy of S.C. Johnson and Son, Inc. (1972).

world, on a very limited basis. In 1972, he made an appearance on "The Great Radio Comedians," filmed for WNET-TV (PBS). Also that same year, he signed to do some filmed television commercials for the Johnson Wax Company and for General Motors Spark Plugs. At a special news conference at the time, in New York City, Jim and his old pal, Hal (Gildersleeve) Peary, were interviewed and they also presented a brief comedy skit for the press. A representative of the City of New York gave Jim a key to the city--and "Fibber", in return, presented his presenter with a key--to the McGee hall closet!

On April 1, 1972. Charles Michaelson, Inc., a distributor of recordings of old radio shows, placed fifty-two of the old Fibber McGee and Molly programs into syndication to radio stations around the country. The new airings brought the famous team hundreds of new fans.

Early in 1974, Jim was back at work on radio starring in a new seven-part radio mini-series sponsored, in syndication, by Chrysler Home Air Conditioning. The program was entitled, "Fibber McGee and the Good Old Days of Radio." Each of the seven shows ran 55 minutes. The scripts were expertly written by Wistful Vista veteran, Phil Leslie. The series aired over more than fifty stations, every other Sunday. The program's host was Chuck Schaden. In the show's format, Chuck visited Fibber at 79 Wistful Vista, where he found him tinkering with an ancient radio set Fibber boasted, as of old, that, according to his "theory of radio dyanetics," that he could adjust his whining old radio set to pick up any old show he wished, simply by tuning the dial.

Each show of the series paid tribute to old shows aired on a particular night of the week. The first program dealt with shows that had been heard on Sunday. The next program reviewed Monday night shows and the third show of the series, transported listeners back to Wistful Vista and its usual Tuesday night time spot. The series continued reviewing various weeknight shows until it concluded by reprising shows that had been aired on Saturday night. Hal Peary and Gale Gordon were on hand for the final taping for the series on February 15, 1974.

Jim continued to make occasional guest appearances throughout the 1970's. On November 2, 1974, he accepted the invitation of TV host Tom Snyder to appear on his "Tomorrow" Show in a sixty-minute "Salute to Old Time Radio," along with Hal Peary, Les Tremayne and radio writer Arch Oboler. Jim also perpetuated his Fibber McGee role at various benefits and anniversary celebrations. In September of 1975, he appeared with Frank Bresee in a two-hour "Night of Nostalgia" as part of a forty-eight



Chico and the Man NBC-TV series starring Freddie Prinze. In the episode entitled 'Old is Gold', telecast on December 17, 1976, Jim Jordan was seen as 'James Maxwell', an aged muffler-mechanic, forced into retirement.

hour benefit show for Hemophilia, aired over station KRLA. Also participating in the benefit were Bill Baldwin, Mel Blanc, Janet Waldo, Les Tremayne, Tyler McVey, Frank Nelson, and several other old-time radio personalities. On October of that same year, Jim joined Bing Crosby, along with Meredith Willson and his orchestra at Treasure Island, California, to salute the 200th Anniversary of the United States Navy. The two-hour show aired from San Francisco, over station KMPX, and was heard overseas via AFRS.

On March 15, 1976, Jim took part in a 90-minute television special "The Good Old Days of Radio with Steve Allen," wherein dozens of noted old-time radio performers recounted the first fifty years of broadcasting history. The genial host introduced the performers from their tables, in the audience. When Jim stood up, he looked around the dining room and wryly remarked:

"Did you ever see so many old people?"

The remark drew a big laugh, so he continued:

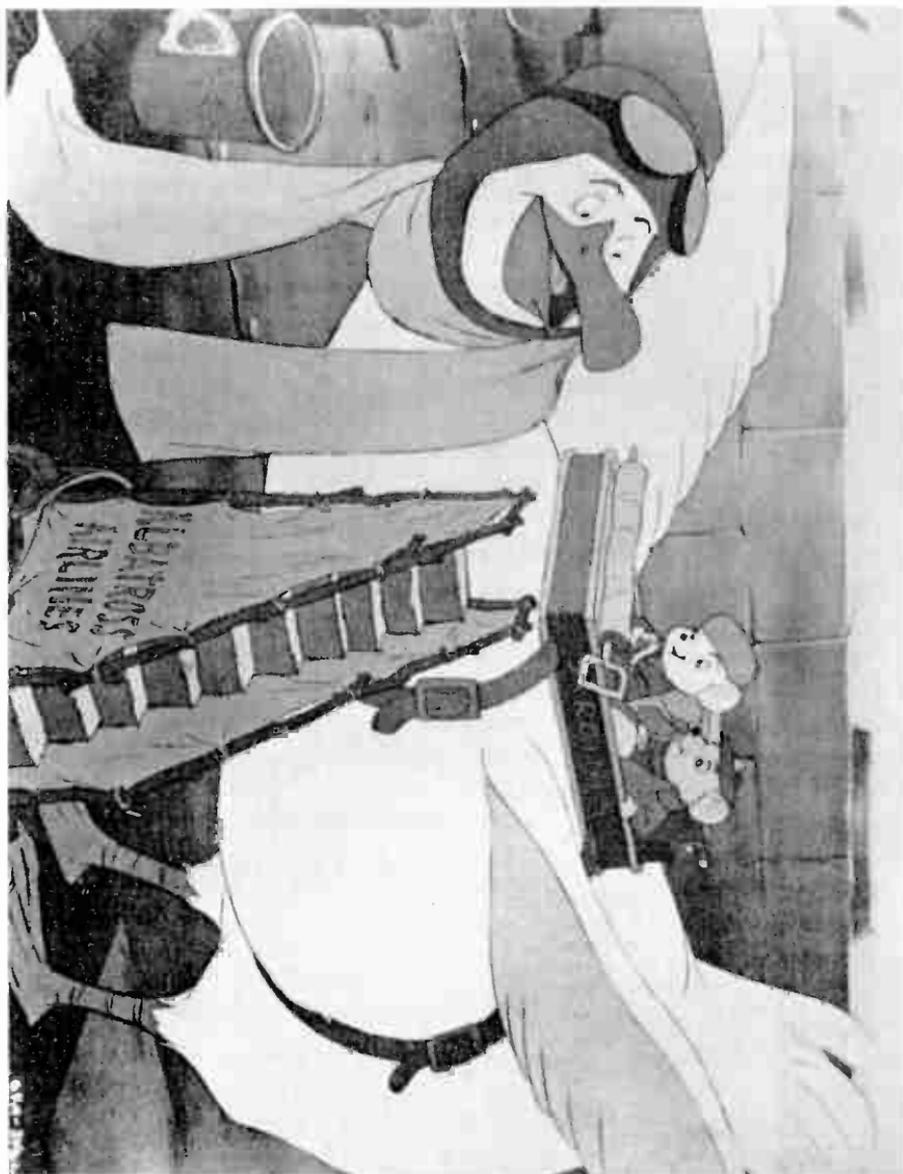
"Does anybody here remember 'Stoopnagle and Budd'?"

Many of his radio colleagues responded in the affirmative, to which Jim quipped:

"Then you're older than I am!"

In the autumn of 1976, the NBC network celebrated its 50th birthday by presenting a special broadcast "NBC: The First Fabulous Fifty." Excerpts of several old Fibber McGee programs were integrated into the series of five weekly 55-minute programs aired over station KFI in Hollywood, between October 10th and November 7th. Two weeks later, NBC celebrated further with a four-and-one-half hour telecast entitled: "NBC: The First Fifty Years", which was hosted by Orson Welles. The treasure trove of nostalgia from the broadcasting history also presented many recorded excerpts of old broadcasts, including a segment with Fibber and Molly.

Jim Jordan was vacationing in the Orient in the fall of 1976 when he received a cable inviting him to make a guest appearance on the NBC-TV series, "Chico and the Man." He accepted and was seen in the episode entitled, "Old is Gold," in which he played the role of James Maxwell, an aged muffler-mechanic forced into retirement. The episode aired on Friday, December 17th. Although Jim appeared on the television screen for less than four full minutes, he scored a resounding hit with his dynamic performance. A review of the show in the New York Times referred to him as "The Corn-Belt Micawber Munchausen." The reviewer went on to state:



A scene from the Walt Disney animated film, 'The Rescuers' in which Jim Jordan supplied the voice of 'Captain Orville', of the one-bird Albatross Airlines (1977). Copyright Walt Disney Productions. (World Rights Reserved.)

"...At 80, Jordan is remarkably trim and compact, with uncorrected eyesight and a neat bush of gray hair. His pointy features have softened enough to give him the look of a tranquil fox. But the voice is exactly the same muted oboe of 'McGee' - double-edged, with bravado and guilt."

In July of 1976, Frank Bresee produced and taped the 8th Annual Golden Days of Radio--"Christmas Special." It was performed in Las Vegas and marked Jim's first appearance on a AFRS Christmas program. The show was transmitted around the world on Christmas Day to United States Armed Forces personnel serving overseas. During the next four years, similar holiday broadcasts were also produced and aired.

In the spring of 1977, Jim reported to the Walt Disney film studios to dub the voice for an animated cartoon character in the feature film, "The Rescuers." He supplied the weary-sounding voice for a decrepit old winged creature named, "Captain Orville," who solely comprised the one-bird Albatross Airlines. Others whose familiar voices were heard in the film included Bob Newhart, Eva Gabor, and Geraldine Page.

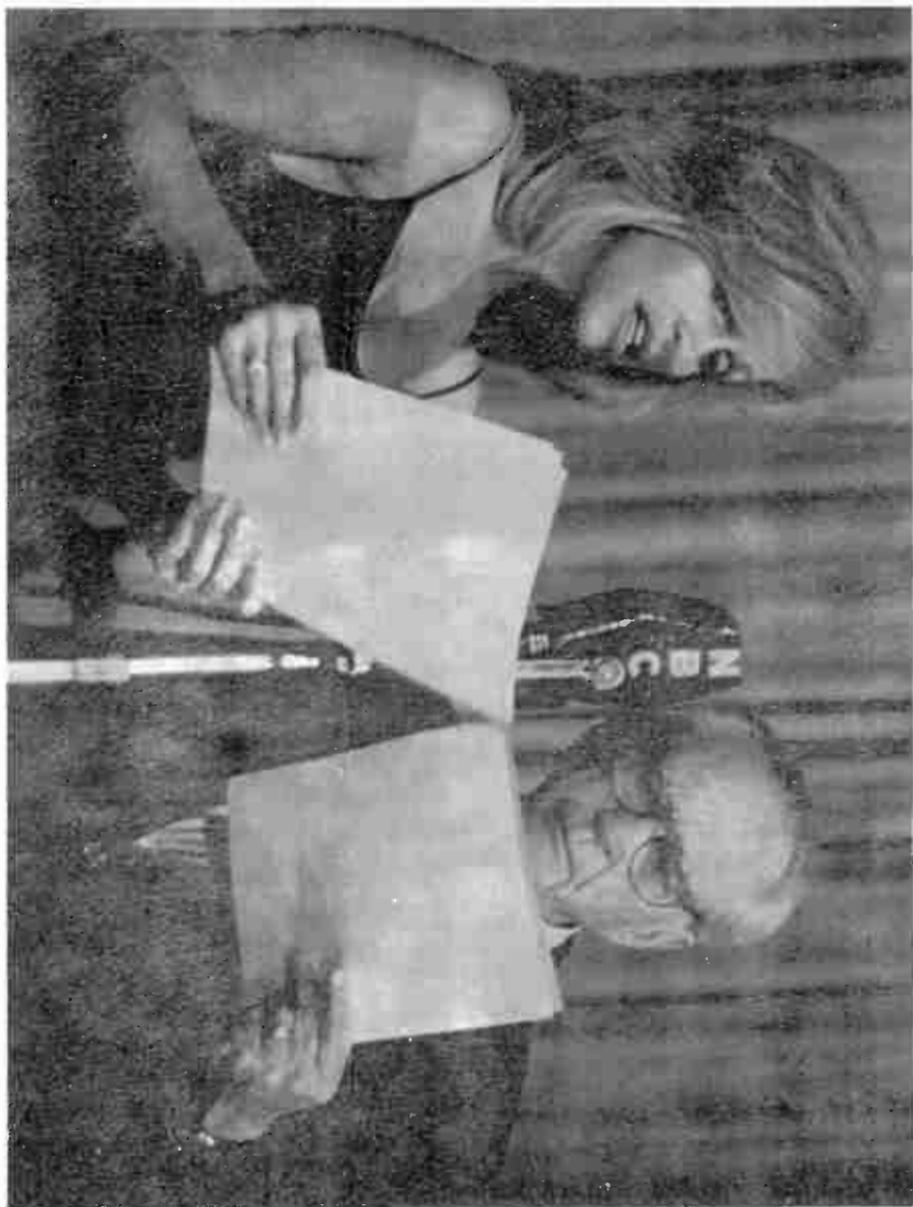
Throughout the nostalgia conscious 1970's, a few of radio's best-remembered announcers and stars were contracted to record commercials for several banking and loan associations on the west coast. Personalities such as George Fenneman, Harry Von Zell, David Nelson, and Hal (Gildersleeve) Peary, were heard giving commercial plugs. In 1977, "Fibber McGee" Jordan signed with a California savings and loan association to voice a few commercials aired in the Hollywood area.

On December 8, 1977, Jim took part in a special three-hour Frank Bresee production of "The Golden Days of Radio," which was presented at the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles for the AFL-CIO Convention.

Old-time fans were elated in 1978 when the Johnson Wax Company sponsored a full year of repeat broadcasts of the old Fibber McGee programs over station WRJN in Racine, Wisconsin, beginning August 23rd. The series of repeat broadcasts continued through August 15, 1979. As a public service, the Johnson Co. used the available commercial air time within the broadcasts to promote community activities in the Racine area.

At a special luncheon meeting of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters on November 17, 1978, Jim was the surprised recipient of their Diamond Circle Award, a unique honor the organization bestows upon outstanding members who have reached their seventy-fifth birthday. Jim was eighty-two years old at the time.

Jim guest-starred on the CBS Sears Radio Theater series on



Motion picture actress Bobbie Bresee portrayed 'Alice Darling' in a sketch with Jim Jordan as part of the 'Night of Nostalgia' staged at the Convention Center in Sacramento, California in November, 1979.

February 20, 1979, in an episode entitled "The Trouble Maker." He was cast as an irate retiree whose income was being jeopardized by corporate management. It was a hilarious tale and found Jim in fine fettle. The program was produced and directed by Elliott Lewis, whose former wife, Cathy Lewis, had portrayed "Molly" in the short-lived television series of 'Fibber McGee and Molly.' Andy Griffith served as the program's host, and the supporting cast reunited six performers who had been associated with the McGee radio show: Elvia Allman, Mary Jane Croft, Shirley Mitchell, Frank Nelson, Rolfe Sedan, and Herb Vigran. Also heard were Jerry Houser and Herb Rudley.

At the 4th Annual Tribute Dinner of SPERDVAC (Society to Preserve Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy) in Los Angeles, on Friday, May 12, 1979 Jim was one of the honored guests along with Phil Leslie and Ken Darby. The highlight of the evening affair was the presentation of a special video tape prepared by Frank Bresee. The tape included segments edited from two of the Jordans feature films, "Look Who's Laughing," and "Here We Go Again," as well as audio portions of several McGee broadcasts, combined with photographic slides to make up the 28-minute presentation.

Leslie and Darby both spoke individually in praise of those good old days back in Wistful Vista. Then, the main attraction, Fibber McGee himself, stepped to the microphone to share his gratitude and McGee-isms. It was a heartwarming and memorable evening. After a standing ovation, Jim was awarded a Life Membership in SPERDVAC.

Despite a troublesome arthritic hip, in November of 1979 Jim once again joined Frank Bresee, along with Dennis Day, Howard Duff, Sam Edwards, and Marvin Miller for a two-hour "Night of Nostalgia," staged at the Convention Center in Sacramento, California. The performance was a benefit for the Sacramento Mailers Union #31 and Central Valley Typographical Union #46. Jim took part in a comedy sketch as "Fibber McGee," and was assisted by Frank Nelson as a mailman, while Bresee's wife, Bobbi, portrayed "Alice Darling." Later that evening Jim was seen on a two-minute interview on the 11:00 p.m. newscast over KRCA (NBC-TV).

Another "Salute to the Golden Days of Radio" was staged at the Sportsman Lodge in Studio City, California on May 16, 1980, for members of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters Assn. Jim took part repeating the same sketch with Frank Nelson heard once again as the mailman, while Shirley Mitchell recreated her original Alice Darling characterization.

Next, Jim joined Bresee Productions for a three-hour telecast



Fibber McGee & Molly - Star on Hollywood Walk of Fame.

fund-raiser aired over KOCE (PBS) in Huntington Beach, California. Also appearing on the telecast were Frank Nelson, Veola Vonn, Janet Waldo, Sam Edwards, Kay St. Germaine, Gary Lycan, Bill Baldwin, and Frank and Bobbi Bresee. Veteran soundman, Cliff Thorsness also participated.

The Chicago Advertising Club celebrated its 75th Anniversary in the autumn of 1980, at which time they selected the best advertising ideas generated in Chicago during their life span. The group cited the Johnson Wax commercials on the Fibber McGee program among the very best. They also noted that the program was the first to carefully integrate its commercials into the script's story line. Singled out for honors were Harlow Wilcox, Marian and Jim Jordan, writer Don Quinn, and the Needham, Louis and Brorby Advertising Agency, who had handled the account.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame was envisioned in 1959 as a lasting tribute to the personalities who helped make Hollywood the most famous city in the world. The walk encompasses five acres of bronze stars embedded in pink terrazzo and surrounded by charcoal hued terrazzo squares. Inside each star is the bronze-engraved name of an artist identified in one of four categories: Motion Pictures, Television, Broadcasting and Recording. The walk lines both sides of Hollywood Boulevard from Gower to Sycamore and both sides of Vine Street, from Yucca to Sunset. Official groundbreaking ceremonies were conducted on February 9, 1950 and within sixteen months more than 1,550 luminaries were forever immortalized in the sidewalk. Since then approximately one star has been added each month. To be honored with a star in Hollywood's Walk of Fame is a tribute coveted and sought after as any other of the entertainment industry's equally prestigious awards.

On Wednesday, December 21, 1983 at 12:30 p.m. during special ceremonies, a bronze star bearing the names of Jim and Marian Jordan "Fibber McGee and Molly" was unveiled on the Walk of Fame. The star is located at 1500 North Vine Street once the location of the NBC studios where the radio show originated. It was the 1,773rd star to be placed in the Walk of Fame. Jim Jordan was present for the unveiling and made a few brief comments. Also present were former members of the radio cast including Gale Gordon, Shirley Mitchell, Elvia Allman, Ken Darby and writer, Phil Leslie. Bill Welsh, President of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce served as master of ceremonies. Following the presentation a reception was held in the clubrooms of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters, of which Jim Jordan serves as Chairman of the Board.



Bill Thompson, Marian, Gale Gordon, and Jim ride on the Wistful Vista float in the 1949 Hollywood Santa Claus Lane Parade.

Although frail health has prevented him from making many public appearances in recent years, on March 20, 1987 Jim Jordan took part in a special presentation made by the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters to the AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Service) in recognition of its many years of meritorious service. Jim needed no introduction to the august body of his peers assembled for the occasion, as he has served the organization as Chairman of the Board for a number of years. It was more than evident that 'McGee' is held in highest esteem and is beloved by all.

In a jovial mood, Jim began by relating a story about a friend of his, of the same age (91), who was riding on a crowded bus and offered a pretty young lady a seat on his lap. Next, he presented a special award to Colonel Tom Louis, the founder of AFRS. This was followed by the presentation of a special award to Frank Bresee in recognition of the 20th anniversary of his "Golden Days of Radio" series aired on AFRS. Following the award Jim quipped:

"I'm tickled to death to give this award to Frank. Besides, he told if I gave it to him - he would give me - a ride home."

Mr. Bresee thanked his long time friend and told of his first meeting of Jim Jordan which took place when he was a 12 year old actor appearing on the Major Hoople radio show with Arthur Q. Bryan. Bryan introduced the youngster to the world renowned radio star, and as Frank recalled: "He scared the devil out of me - but years later I found out he's really a 'pussy-cat'."

Time has not diminished the keen 'Fibber McGee' wit, nor the playful gleam in the comedy master's blue-grey eyes.



Jim, Jr., catches his niece, Diane (sister Kay's child) at the end of her ride, as Grandma and Grandpa Jordan look on.

## Reminiscences, Sage Observations and Advice

Unlike the fictional "Fibber McGee," Jim Jordan has always been quite handy with tools. He has stressed the point, that in real life, his own character differs greatly from Mr. McGee. Jordan is astute, bright and clever, yet, quietly shy. Everything that Jim Jordan gets involved with is well-calculated and completed in scheduled time. He is reverently devoted to his wife, Gretchen, his home life and his religion.

Marian and Jim had always remained very fond of their old home town, Peoria, Illinois. Through the years the ties to Peoria may have been stretched, but never severed. As Jim once recalled:

*"We had a lot of references to Peoria on the program. Fibber'd talk about Main Street hill, canoeing on the Illinois River and various characters from town. Our families were pretty tight-knit. Everybody around us was interested in theater. One friend of ours went into show business early. Our families and friends were all supportive (he chuckled) .. except when we weren't working...There was always something magical about Peoria. (During its heyday the town had a half-dozen major theaters: the block-long Hippodrome, the Madison, Majestic, Orpheum, Palace and Rialto) . In vaudeville, burlesque and road shows, performers couldn't wait to get to Peoria. There was a lot of life there then, it was a wide-open town - pretty wild! ... we built an apartment house there in the '50s, and we still have relatives there."*

In a November 1980 interview, Jim shared a few fond reminiscences and made some sage observations, as well as offering a bit of good advice.

Commenting on the present lives of his son and daughter:

*"Kathy is married and lives in Malibu. Jim lives in Reno and is involved in real estate development with me in Carson City. Jim, however, has a heart condition and can't do too much now, at age fifty-seven."*

When asked what advice he would give the youth of today Mr. Jordan replied without hesitation:

*"Get an education! Be sure you get it. It's more important today than it was back when I was a kid. The reason I can tell 'em, and I'll tell 'em right quick, I know they must get an education. And how I know it! I'm a high school dropout myself. So I know what I went through because of it - a lot of struggle. In those days, high school dropouts were a lot more common than they are today. Many kids had to go to work part time and to school part time. I grew up in the countryside outside of Peoria where it was half*



• SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY. •  
 MR. AND MRS. **JAMES JORDAN** (FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY) STARTED THEIR COURTSHIP AT CHOIR PRACTICE, IN PEORIA, ILLINOIS.

1-29-45

In April, 1950, the Jordans made a return visit to their old home town Peoria, Illinois. They visited St. Johns church and chatted with young singers in the choir. Marian and Jim met here at choir practice in December, 1915.



WorldRadioHistory



Visiting a home town school in Peoria, Illinois, in 1950 Jim gets lost in a 'daydream' as Marian studies her lesson.

*farming and half coal mining. Half of the kids were farmers and the other half were coal miners. The coal mining kids had to quit school in the middle of winter to help their dads pull coal out of the mines ... I had an advantage. I would sing for someone and get a job. If I hadn't had a natural singing talent, I'd have been sunk. People without a natural talent have it rough. I had a chance once to teach voice at the university level, but I couldn't get the job because I didn't have a college education."*

When asked to voice his opinion on the kinds of humor being used by the various entertainment media today, and whether he found it funny, Mr. Jordan observed:

*"The only way you can get to know about humor is to try it out. See if it goes - or not. Humor doesn't change - people think it does. Subjects for humor change, it changes in that respect. Subjects we used twenty years ago are not necessarily funny today. I think humor is still based largely on 'the lie' - exaggeration. But you lie about different things now than you did ten years ago ..."*

Asked if he thought radio would ever return, Jim replied:

*"People keep asking me if radio will ever come back. And I keep tellin' 'em NO. I tell 'em - radio never left!"*

Finally, when asked how he would wish to be remembered in the annals of radio history, Jim's reply was somewhat surprising:

*"I only think about my peers. I only want to be remembered by the people I spent my life working with. I want to be remembered as somebody who was 'on the square.' I just want to be respected by the people I worked with."*

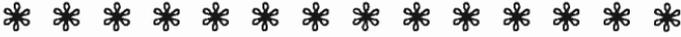
Many of the outstanding talents who made up the Fibber McGee and Molly program are no longer with us today ... Marian Jordan's passing on April 6, 1961 had been preceded by the passing of Marlin Hurt on March 21, 1946, Arthur Q. Bryan on November 30, 1959, Harlow Wilcox on September 24, 1960, Ted Weems on May 6, 1963, Donald Novis on July 23, 1966, Don Quinn on December 30, 1967, Bea Benaderet on October 14, 1968, Bill Thompson on July 15, 1971, Billy Mills on October 20, 1971, Isabel Randolph on January 11, 1973, Cecil Underwood on September 27, 1976, Hugh Studebaker on May 6, 1978, Hal Peary on March 30, 1985 and Herb Vigran on November 28, 1986.

The outstanding talents of these fine performers made many contributions to the Golden Age of Radio and will be long remembered. Their familiar voices will echo eternally through the expansive ether. We thank them all for so many hours of listening pleasure ... and for so many HEAVENLY DAYS.

T'WAS FUNNY, MCGEE!

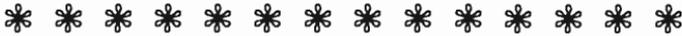


Outstanding citizens of Wistful Vista (1947): (standing) Arthur Q. Bryan, Billy Mills, The King's Men (Ken Darby, Rad Robinson, Budd Linn and Jon Dodson), Gene "Lena" Carroll, and Gale Gordon; (kneeling and seated) Harlow Wilcox, Jim and Marian, Don Quinn, and Bill Thompson.



CURTAIN

CALLS





## **JIM & MARIAN JORDAN** (Fibber McGee and Molly)

Jim Jordan was born November 16, 1896 in Peoria, Illinois. He entered show business as a professional singer and small-time vaudevillian prior to being drafted into the army in September 1918.

Marian Driscoll was born April 15, 1898, also in Peoria. As a young girl she studied piano, voice and violin. She married Jim Jordan in August 1918.

After Jim's discharge from the army in 1919 he and Marian joined several other musicians to form a touring concert act, "The Metropolitan Entertainers." Later the Jordans ventured into vaudeville where they were billed as "Marian and Jim - Harmony Team." Their radio career began at station WIBO in Chicago in 1924 where they were featured as the singing "O'Henry Twins." In 1925 they began "The Smith Family," a continuing drama/comedy series at station WENR. This is considered to be the forerunner of radio's soap operas. Marian and Jim were also heard on "The Air Scouts," a musical program for children. In 1931 they started their own comedy series at WMAQ called "Smackout," which eventually brought them to network radio.

Jim worked solo on one of radio's earliest quiz shows "Mr. Twister." Together they were heard on programs such as "The Breakfast Club," "Saturday Night Jamboree," "Kaltenmeyer's Kindergarten" and "The Farm and Home Hour." Their greatest radio success came as FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY which ran from 1935 to 1956.

A shortened version ran on NBC's "Monitor" weekend program for several additional years. The Jordans also appeared in several films as "Fibber McGee and Molly": "This Way Please" (1937), "Look Who's Laughing" (1941), "Here We Go Again" (1942), and "Heavenly Days" (1944).

Marian Jordan died of cancer on April 7, 1961. Jim retired from show business in 1961 following Marian's death. In 1962 he married Gretchen Stewart, the widow of Harry Stewart, an entertainer well-known for his "Yogi Yorgeson" recordings. They are still living in California, enjoying the privacy and comfort of retirement.



Versatile Elvia Allman was first heard on the program in 1939 as a saleslady. Later, she played Mayor LaTrivia's secretary 'Miss Himmler' and Aunt Sarah Driscoll's private secretary, 'Miss Long Feather'. She also was heard in various society matron roles such as Mrs. Heinz of 57 Varieties Avenue, Miss Rhoda Dendron and Mrs. Albert Clammer.

**ELVIA ALLMAN**  
(Mrs. Clammer - others)

Born in Concord, North Carolina. She is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts in Chicago. First appeared on radio in 1930 via KHJ in Los Angeles on "Uncle John's Children's Hour." In 1937 she was the voice of "Penelope the Pelican" in the popular Christmas radio series "The Cinnamon Bear." She was also heard on radio in "Town Hall Tonight," "Glamor Manor," "Melody and Madness," "Al Pearce and His Gang," and the "Abbott and Costello" program. She played: "Cuddles Bongschoonk" ("Jimmy Durante and Garry Moore Show"), "Cobina" ("Bob Hope Show"), "Tootsie Sagwell" ("Burns and Allen Show). and both "Cora Dithers" and "Mrs. Buff-orington" ("Blondie").

She has also appeared in many films and on television.

**CLIFF ARQUETTE**  
(The Old Timer - Bessie - others)

Born December 28, 1907 in Toledo, Ohio. He was the son of the vaudeville team "Clark and Arquette." As a very young man he worked as a cartoonist on a Toledo newspaper. At the age of sixteen he headed west to Los Angeles, where he played in a band, worked the vaudeville circuit, and ventured into radio. Arquette's first network radio show was with Fred Astaire. He became one of the busiest actors in radio and held the record for having appeared on thirteen different shows in a single day. Among his many roles was the pixilated "Mrs. Wilson" on "Glamor Manor." In 1953 he introduced his famous "Charlie Weaver" character on the "Dennis Day" television series. Arquette later made many guest appearances as "Charlie Weaver" with "Jack Paar," as well as on many other talk and quiz shows. "Charlie" often read letters from his mama back in Mt. Idy, with news of such fictitious characters as Elsie Crack, Leonard Box, Wallace Swine, Grandma Ogg, and other folks around Snyder's Swamp. Arquette was an expert woodcarver and had a museum of miniature handcarved figures tracing the history of military dress in the United States. He suffered a stroke in 1972 and was forced into retirement. Troupier that he was, he made a come-back in 1973 and passed away at the age of sixty-eight on September 23, 1974.



Bea Benaderet played 'Mrs. Millicent Carstairs' a member of Wistful Vista's social elite. She and her husband raised navel oranges in their back yard, but in order not to sound vulgar, she referred to their crop as 'Citrus-Umbilicus.' Fibber referred to her as 'The Rhinestone Rhinoceros.' Miss Benaderet was heard in other roles such as beautician Else Merkel.

## BEA BENADERET

(Mrs. Millicent Carstairs - Elsie Merkel - others)

Born in New York City on April 4, 1906. As a child she studied voice and piano. After moving to the west coast, she studied acting at the Reginald Travis School in San Francisco. The manager of a local radio station heard her in a children's production of "The Beggar's Opera" and signed her as a vocalist at station KGO. Later, at station KFRC she was a member of the staff serving as actress, singer, announcer, writer and producer. She married actor-announcer Jim Bannon in 1938.

After the birth of a son and a daughter, the couple divorced. She later married sound technician Gene Twombly. Her first big break in radio came in a featured spot on the "Jack Benny" program as a Brooklyn telephone operator, "Gertrude Gearshift."

Other memorable radio roles were: "Amber Lipscott" ("My Friend Irma"), "Gloria, the maid" (The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet), "Eve Goodwin" ("The Great Gildersleeve"). and "Wanda Werewolf" ("Glamor Manor"). On television Miss Benaderet enjoyed an eight-year run as "Blanche Morton" on the "Burns and Allen" show. She was tested for the role of "Granny Clampett" on "The Beverly Hillbillies." Because she looked too young, she was cast, instead, in the role of "Cousin Pearl Bodine" during the first season. This latter characterization led to the leading role of "Kate Bradley" on the "Petticoat Junction" series. Miss Benaderet was also the voice of "Betty Rubble" in the cartoon series, "The Flintstones." In 1967 she was stricken with lung cancer and underwent surgery. She returned to her role on the "Petticoat Junction" series and filmed five additional episodes before she was forced back into the hospital. She passed away at the age of sixty-two, on October 13, 1968. Her husband, Gene Twombly, died four days later of a heart attack.



Genial Arthur Q. Bryan began his show business career as a tenor, and performed mostly with quartets. He entered radio in 1924 and became an announcer by accident when he filled in for Norman Brokenshire. In 1938 he was heard on The Grouch Club program that dramatized 'pet peeves' sent in by listeners. Bryan created the baby-voiced 'Waymond Wadcliffe' on The Band Wagon program and used the same voice as 'Elmer Fudd' in the Bugs Bunny cartoons. He joined the McGee show as Doc Gamble in 1943 and remained a regular for the remainder of the program's regular run.

## **ARTHUR Q. BRYAN** (Doc Gamble - others)

Born in Brooklyn, New York on May 8, 1899. He began his career as a tenor and performed mostly with quartets. He entered radio in 1924 and became an announcer by accident in 1929 when he filled in for a sick friend. In 1932 Bryan was with station WCAU in Philadelphia where he served as writer, producer, and on occasion, actor. In 1938 he was heard on "The Grouch Club" program that dramatized "pet peeves" sent in by listeners. He introduced the character "Waymond Wadcliffe" on "The Band Wagon" program with Dick Powell. "Waymond's" voice was similar to that of cartoon character "Elmer Fudd," the exasperated baby-talking rabbit hunter of the "Bugs Bunny" cartoons. In 1942 Bryan was started in "The Major Hoople" radio series and was also heard as "Floyd, the barber" on "The Great Gildersleeve" show. Bryan joined the Fibber McGee show as "Doc Gamble" in 1943 and remained a regular for the remainder of the program's regular run. When Don Quinn created the radio series "The Halls of Ivy," he wrote in the role of "Professor Warren" for Bryan. Bryan passed away at the age of sixty on November 30, 1959.

## **GENE CARROLL** (Lena, the maid)

Born April 18, 1889. He began his show business career in vaudeville in 1914 in an act in which he impersonated a spinster schoolteacher. Female impersonations became his stock in trade. In Chicago he entered radio on WLS and sang with various partners. He teamed with Glen Rowell and eventually the pair starred in their own series known as "Jake and Lena" (Carroll played both title roles.). After he and Rowell broke up their act, he brought his "Lena" character to the McGee show briefly in 1947. Carroll then returned to Cleveland, Ohio where he conducted "The Gene Carroll Show" weekly on television station WEWS. Carroll helped many talented newcomers to get a break in show business by introducing them on his show. He passed away at the age of seventy-four on March 5, 1972.



Mary Jane Croft was heard frequently during the 15 minute series. Born in Muncie, Indiana, entered radio in Chicago where she was usually cast in 'home breaker' roles in soap operas and such programs as True Story Court of Human Relations, Famous Jury Trials and True Detective Mysteries. Her best remembered role was in the television series 'The People's Choice' in which she supplied the voice for a talking basset hound named 'Cleo.'

**PERRY COMO**  
(Vocalist, Ted Weems band)

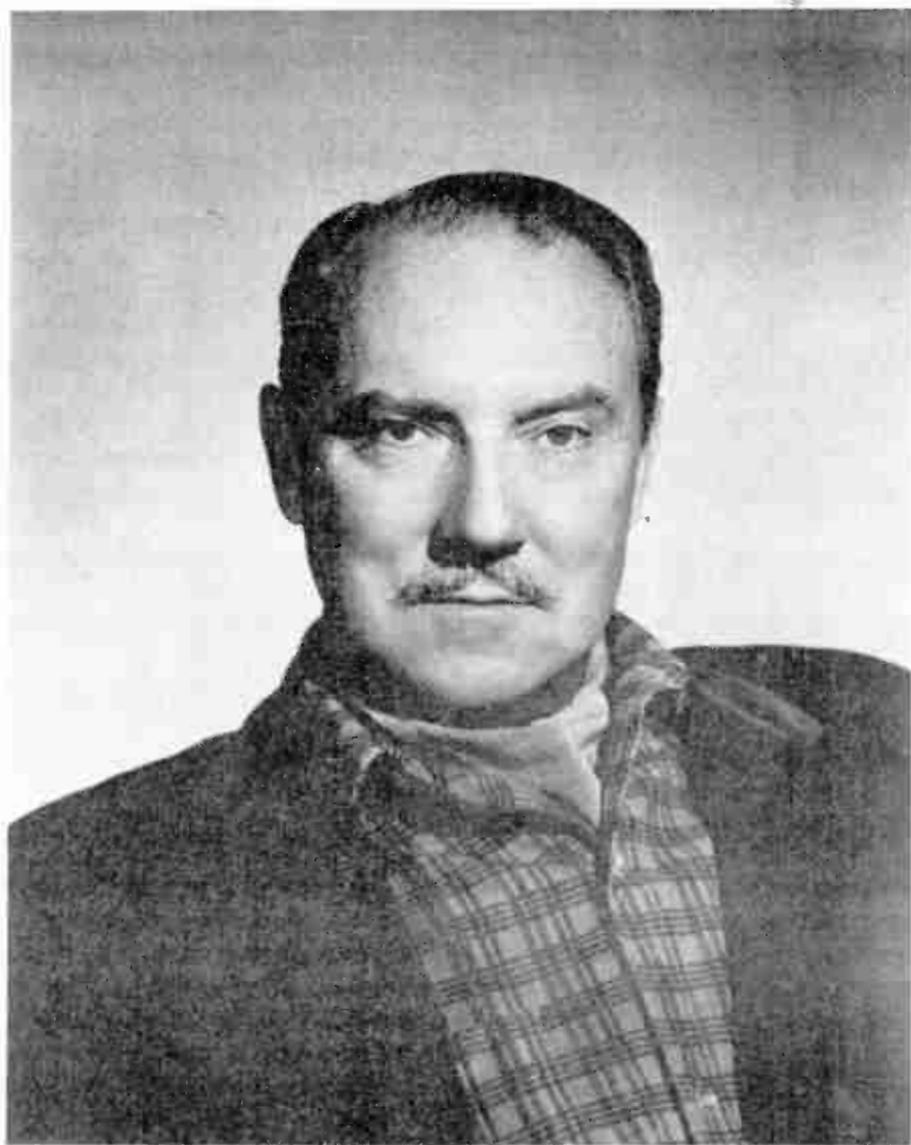
Born in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania on May 18, 1912. His first career was as a teenaged barber. In 1933 he auditioned for bandleader Freddie Carlone in Cleveland and got the job as band vocalist. Soon thereafter he married his childhood sweetheart, Roselle Bellini. Como later signed with the Ted Weems band and was a featured vocalist on the "Fibber McGee" show between June 1936 and January 1938. In 1942 CBS gave Como his own radio show--"The Chesterfield Supper Club," which brought him to stardom. Como entered television in 1948, where his seemingly effortless singing style earned him the title "Mr. Relaxation." He remains a popular recording artist, makes occasional personal appearances, and hosts annual television specials.

**MARY JANE CROFT**  
(various roles in 15 minute series)

Actress with distinctive voice was born in Muncie, Indiana. Left teachers college to join a stock company in Cincinnati. Venured into radio work at station WLW where she was heard on shows such as "Ma Perkins", "Famous Jury Trials" and "True Story". Moved to Hollywood in 1939 ,and was often heard in support of radio comedians Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor and Joan Davis.

Played a cockney maid on a broadcast of "Sherlock Holmes" with Basil Rathbone. Among her many featured roles were Alice Henderson on "Beulah", Evelina on "Honest Harold", Betty on "The Mel Blanc Show", and Christine Abbott on "One Man's Family", also heard on dramatic series "On Stage" and "Twelve Players."

Had a leading role in short lived soap opera "Story of Sandra Martin" story of a lady reporter in love with a daring detective. On television was seen in frequent support of Lucille Ball. Possibly her best remembered role, although she was never seen on screen, was that of the voice of a talking basset hound named 'Cleo' on the television series, "The People's Choice." Married actor-producer-director Elliott Lewis in 1960.



Fibber's long time nemesis was 'Mayor Charles LaTrivia.' Played to perfection by Gale Gordon. The name of the fictional mayor of Wistful Vista was obviously borrowed from New York City's Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Gordon also played the role of the dense weatherman 'Foggy Williams.'

## CLARK DENNIS (Vocalist)

Born in Roscommon, Michigan on December 19, 1911. Made his first radio appearance in 1930 at station WFDF in Flint, Michigan. In 1934 the popular tenor was given his own sponsored radio program. Clark joined Ben Pollock's band and moved to Chicago in 1935. He made frequent appearances on the "Fibber McGee" program and left the show in 1938 in order to go on tour with Paul Whitemen's band. Clark married Jane Vance, a former singer with the Whiteman band. In April of 1956 he opened a bookstore located in Studio City, California.

## GALE GORDON (Mayor LaTrivia - "Foggy" Williams - others)

Born, Charles T. Aldrich, in New York City on February 2, 1905. His father was a famous vaudevillian, as was his mother, Gloria Gordon. Gordon was educated in New York City, as well as abroad in England, while his parents were appearing on the English concert stage. He made his own legitimate state debut at the age of seventeen with famed actor Richard Bennett in "The Dancers." Gordon later toured in a leading role in "Seventh Heaven." He made his radio debut under most inauspicious circumstances in 1926, when he wandered into the studio of KFVB in Hollywood. He was put on the air and strummed the only four chords that he knew, on a borrowed ukulele, while singing his own version of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More." Gordon began his professional radio career in 1933 on the continuing dramatic series, "English Coronets," as well as in many other early dramas. He was leading man to Irene Rich for seven years on her "Dear John" romantic series. Although he was known as one of radio's finest dramatic actors, he made his comedy debut on the "Fibber McGee" program. He joined the show in 1939 and, with the exception of his three-year enlistment as a gunnery instructor for the U.C. Coast Guard during World War II, was on the show for thirteen years. Among Gordon's other memorable radio roles: "Harry Graves" (Junior Miss) and "Osgood Conklin," the Principal of Madison High School on "Our Miss Brooks." On television he played "Mr. Wilson" on the "Dennis the Menace" series. Gordon is perhaps best remembered for his television roles



Listeners could never really be sure just who they were listening to. Radio was full of surprises. For instance, the voice of 'Beulah', the McGee's black housekeeper really belonged to versatile actor Marlin Hurt. He was given his own spin-off series in July, 1945.

on "The Lucy Show" and "Here's Lucy," both, of course, starring Lucille Ball. Gordon married radio actress Virginia Curley. His hobbies include painting in oils, writing plays, and collecting guns and pipes. He is still active on stage and in television.

## **MARLIN HURT** (Beulah)

Born in DuQuoin, Illinois on May 27, 1905. Hurt once earned a living by working as both a coal miner and maker of cigars. He was a talented musician, saxophone player and vocalist and once sang with the Vincent Lopez band. In 1938 he became "Dick" of the popular singing trio "Tom, Dick and Harry." The group was heard frequently on radio through 1943. Hurt first experimented with his famous "Beulah" characterization in 1938 on NBC's Plantation Party show. "Beulah" was heard for the first time on the "Fibber McGee" show on January 25, 1944. The character made an instant hit and became a regular member of the cast. Hurt left the McGee program to star in his own "Beulah" series for CBS in 1945. His show was on the air for less than a year when he died of a heart attack at the age of forty on March 21, 1946.

## **THE KING'S MEN QUARTET:**

### **KEN DARBY:** (Musical arranger/Bass)

In 1928, while doing post-graduate work at Chapman College in Los Angeles, Ken Darby formed "The Ramblers" quartet. He served the group as arranger, pianist and bass-singer. Other members were: Bud Linn, top tenor; Jon Dodson, second tenor; and Joseph Galkin, baritone. A year later Galkin was replaced by Rad Robinson. In 1930, while working at station WTM, the group was billed as "The Gold Medal Freight Quartet," but a later name change made them "The King's Men," while working at station KFWB. After singing over various Hollywood stations for three years, they submitted an audition recording to Paul Whiteman who sent for them to join him for some stage appearances in New York. The group remained in the east and sang on many shows including:



The Kings Men Quartet: Grafton Linn, Radburn Robinson, Jon Dodson and Ken Darby. (1934).

"The Old Gold Paul Whiteman Hour," "The Fire Chief" (with Ed Wynn). "Mobil's Flying Horse Tavern," and "Burns and Allen." In 1936 they had their own program on NBC called "The Kings Men Sing." They returned to the west coast in 1938 and sang on the "Fred Allen," "Rudy Vallee," "Almond Roca," and "Westinghouse" shows. In 1942 Darby had a show of his own, "The Top of the Evening on NBC." The quartet joined the "Fibber McGee" program on February 6, 1940 and remained a popular feature through the end of the half-hour broadcasts on June 30, 1953. In all, they racked up a total of 504 appearances on the program.

The group began appearing in early talking films in 1929 and were heard on the soundtracks of films such as "Sweetie" and "Only the Brave." In 1934 they appeared on the screen in "We're Not Dressing." The year 1939 was an especially busy one for film work with appearances in "Ice Follies of 1939," and in the musical, "Honolulu" they impersonated the Marx Brothers, with two Grouchos. At Paramount Pictures they sang in three of the Hopalong Cassidy series: "Renegade Trail" (1939), "The Showdown" (1940), and "Stagecoach War" (1940). They were also heard on the soundtracks of three Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald films. Ken Darby is a noted musical arranger and prolific composer. Among his many compositions are "Ebony," for orchestra and voice, and "The Lake," for string orchestra.

While under contract to MGM studios in 1939, Darby was assigned the unusual duty of producing the voices for the "Munchkins" in "The Wizard of Oz." The midgets who portrayed the characters on the screen were not able to handle the music properly, so other voices had to be dubbed in. Along with Doug Shearer, the head of the sound department at MGM, Darby designed a new gear for the film recorder which slowed down the recording speed from 90 to 70 feet per minute. The voices of the King's Men Quartet, along with additional singers, were recorded at the slower speed, at a lower pitch, and at a much slower tempo than normal. When played back at 90 feet per minute, the "Munchkin sound" was achieved. Darby also arranged the musical score and supplied the singers for the first commercial record album of "The Wizard of Oz." The album was released by Decca Records. In 1943 Darby was the vocal arranger for "Higher and Higher," the film which introduced Frank Sinatra to the screen at RKO Pictures. The following year he performed similar duties for Sinatra in the film, "Step Lively."

From 1941 to 1948 Darby was under contract to the Walt Disney Studios as choral arranger, musical director, composer and lyricist.



As Marian and Jim depart for their 1949 summer hiatus, they hand over the NBC microphone to The Kings Men who filled the Tuesday night time slot for Johnson's Wax with their 'King For a Night' program. Marian, Jim, Ken Darby, Rad Robinson, Jon Dodson and Budd Linn.

He worked on the Disney productions of "Dumbo," "Pinnochio," "Make Mine Music," "Fun and Fancy Free," "Song of the South," and "So Dear To My Heart."

Darby also served a seven-year contract with Alfred Newman, musical director for 20th Century Fox Studios. He supervised several of Betty Grable's last big musical films: "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" (1949), "Beautiful Blonde From Bashful Bend" (1949), "Wabash Avenue" (1950), "My Blue Heaven" (1950); "Meet Me After The Show" (1951), and "How To Marry a Millionaire" (1953). He also supervised the music for several of Marilyn Monroe's films including: "How to Marry a Millionaire" (1953), "The River of No Return" (1954), "There's No Business Like Show Business" (1954), and "Bus Stop" (1956).

Darby also supervised the music for Elvis Presley's screen debut, "Love Me Tender" (1956), for which he composed the score, including the highly popular title tune. He penned the song under his wife's maiden name, "Vera Matson." Darby also worked on "Hound Dog Man," the film that introduced teen-aged singing idol, Fabian, to the screen. In 1961 Darby became a free-lance conductor of choruses and orchestras for film scoring. Samuel Goldwyn engaged his services for "Porgy and Bess" in 1959, to serve as associate music director under Andre Previn. Darby won an Oscar nomination for adapting the George Gershwin score for the screen. The film won Previn and Darby Oscars for "Best Scoring of a Musical Motion Picture." The soundtrack recording also won a Grammy Award. In 1960 Darby worked on the score for "Elmer Gantry" at Columbia Pictures, and in 1961 he assisted with the scoring of "Flower Drum Song" at Universal Pictures. His other musical scoring credits include the film version of "Finian's Rainbow." In 1963 Darby composed and arranged two songs for actor Lorne Green--"Saga of the Ponderosa," and "Endless Prairie." Both songs were made into successful recordings by the actor. Darby has won three Oscars: "Porgy and Bess" (1959), "The King and I" (1956), and "Camelot" (1967).



Peggy Knudsen joined the McGee program for occasional roles beginning April, 1951 and continued through March, 1955. In real life Miss Knudsen was married to Jim Jordan, Jr.

## **OTHER MEMBERS OF THE KINGS MEN QUARTET:**

### **JON DODSON** (Second Tenor)

Born in Richland, Missouri on March 28, 1907. His real name was John Dodson Blunt. He sang second tenor with the Kings Men group. He died of acute alcoholism in 1963.

### **BUD LINN** (Top Tenor)

Born Grafton Linn in Indianapolis, Indiana on April 30, 1909. He sang top tenor with the quartet. Linn started out as a sociology major before switching his interest to music. He passed away of cardiac arrest, at the age of fifty-nine on July 31, 1968.

### **RAD ROBINSON** (Baritone)

Radburn Robinson was born in Bountiful, Utah on November 11, 1909. He replaced baritone Joseph Galkin in the Kings Men group in 1929. During the early 40's he served in the Air Force. In his absence, baritone Raymond Clark filled in for him with the quartet. Robinson resides in Las Vegas and occasionally performs in casinos in Atlantic City and in the Bahamas.

### **PEGGY KNUDSEN** (various roles)

Born in 1925 in Duluth, Minnesota. Her ambition to become an actress took her to New York City and her patriotism led her to much volunteer work at the Stage Door Canteen. Big break came in December 1942 when she took over the role of 'Eileen' in the Broadway hit 'My Sister Eileen.' First radio work was in Chicago where she took over the leading role in the serial 'Woman in White'. This was followed by some modeling. Signed to a film contract by Warner Brothers, she appeared in such notable films



Top: Dick LeGrand was heard as Ole, the Swedish janitor. His best remembered role on radio was as Peavy, the mild-mannered druggist on *The Great Gildersleeve* program. Bottom: Cliff Arquette created the role of the 'Old Timer' on the *Fibber McGee* show. The part was later taken over by Bill Thompson.

as A Stolen Life, Never Say Goodbye, Humoresque, Trouble Preferred, Copper Canyon, Unchained and Good Morning Miss Dove. Best remembered for role as 'big sister Lois' on radio series 'Junior Miss'. Married to Jim Jordan, Jr. Was heard on the McGee program in various roles.

### **TOM KOCH** (Writer-Monitor series)

Born in Charleston, Illinois in 1925. Received a B.S. in Journalism and an M.A. in Political Science from Northwestern University. After a short stint as a drug store delivery boy, he went directly into the field of professional writing. Koch began his radio writing work at CBS in 1947 as a staff writer handling news and sports. In 1955 he switched to NBC where he became a staff writer on the network's "Weekend Monitor" program and was assigned the job of writing short comedy sketches for "Bob and Ray." In 1956 he wrote scripts for the same team that were aired over the Mutual network. Except for the first five weekends of broadcasts, Koch wrote all of the "Fibber McGee and Molly" spots aired over "Weekend Monitor" from 1957 to 1959. When "Bob and Ray" moved to station WHN in New York in 1963, Koch also wrote for them there, as well as for their shows aired over WOR in 1974. In 1957 he began to write articles for Mad Magazine. By recent count, he has written more than 150 feature articles for the popular magazine devoted to off-beat humor. Koch's television credits include scripts for "The George Gobel Show" (1958/60), "The Lucy Show" (1962), as well as "The Jonathan Winters Show" (1967/69) and "The Pat Paulsen Show" (1969/70).

### **DICK LeGRAND** (Ole Swenson - others)

Born in Portland, Oregon on August 29, 1882. At the age of sixteen, he went to sea for three years, traveling several times to Great Britain and Hong Kong. After returning to the States, LeGrand got a job assisting backstage at the Bijou Theater where one of his duties was sifting the artificial snow for a dramatic scene in wintry melodrama, "The Climber." One day he was sent onstage to substitute for a missing actor and the acting bug bit him.



Phil Leslie was hired as Don Quinn's writing assistant in 1943. He was eventually promoted to head writer of the McGee show in 1950 when Quinn left.

LeGrand went on to play juvenile leads in musical comedies and also worked in touring tent shows and on the vaudeville stage. Adept at dialects, he had an early radio program called "Ole and the Girls." LeGrand was a fine dramatic actor and expert comedian and master of low key delivery. He was heard in various roles for the Carleton E. Morse radio series, "One Man's Family" and "I Love a Mystery." One of LeGrand's most popular roles was that of "Peavy" the mild-mannered druggist heard on "The Great Gildersleeve" program. His famous catch-phrase on the show was "Well, now - I wouldn't say that!" LeGrand joined the McGee show in 1948 as Ole, the Swedish janitor. His catch-phrase on the McGee show was an agitated, "I'm yust donatin' my time!"

### PHIL LESLIE (Writer)

Born in Morley, Missouri. In 1939 he left college to go to California to apprentice as a comedy writer for radio star Al Pearce. After the Pearce show left the air, Leslie, a married man with three small children to support, found employment at Lockheed Aircraft as a timekeeper. In his spare time, he continued writing by supplying monologues for comedian/pianist Victor Borge's appearances on "The Kraft Music Hall" show. In 1942 he was signed by NBC to write scripts for their new "Major Hoople" comedy series. The following year he became assistant writer to Don Quinn on the "Fibber McGee" program. Leslie was eventually promoted to head writer when Quinn left the show in 1950. Leslie's other major radio credits include the "Beulah," "Glamor Manor," "Roy Rogers," and "Charlotte Greenwood" shows.

His many television credits include scripts for "Dennis the Menace," "Hazel," "The Farmer's Daughter," "The Addams Family," "The Brady Bunch," "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Petticoat Junction," "The Lucy Show," and the pilot script for "The Donna Reed Show."



Ulderico Marcelli, the Italian-born orchestra leader, was the first music maestro on the McGee program. Adept at both symphonic and popular music, 'Rico' was recognized as a fine showman. The unique rhythm of his music reflected his South American background. He made his American debut as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony.

## **ULDERICO "RICO" MARCELLI** (Orchestra leader)

Born in Rome in 1899. Studied at the National Conservatory in Santiago, Chile as well as under a scholarship in Rome. He later taught music for nine years at the National Conservatory in Quito, Ecuador. Mr. Marcelli made his debut as a conductor with the San Francisco Symphony. He also conducted the Hollywood Bowl Symphony, as well as several other symphony orchestras. Marcelli was affiliated with the Grauman Chinese Theatre in Hollywood for five years. A versatile composer and musician, he played violin, viola and French horn. Adept at both symphonic and popular music, he was recognized as a fine showman. The unique rhythm of his music reflected his South American background. Among his many musical compositions is the symphonic poem entitled "Immortal Light," which is a musical eulogy to Thomas Edison. Marcelli's radio credits include NBC's "House By the Side of the Road" (1934/35), "Fibber McGee and Molly" (1935/36) and "The Contented Hour" (1940). During the time Mr. Marcelli conducted the orchestra for the McGee program the featured violinist in his orchestra was Miss Audrey Call, who presented frequent violin solos on the show. Miss Call had begun her musical education at the age of three and appeared as a prodigy from her eighth year into her early teens. She gained national acclaim in 1926 after winning two major violin competitions. The following year she went to the Paris Conservatoire. She married Marcelli in 1937 and continues her musical career today as a violinist, composer, and teacher at her private studio in Sunland, California. Mr. Marcelli, in addition to his many musical talents, was a fine artist who worked mainly in oils. He was also a well-known caricaturist. He passed away in August 1962.

## **BILLY MILLS** (Orchestra Leader)

Born in Flint, Michigan on September 6, 1894. Educated at the University of Syracuse and the University of Michigan. Mills began his musical career as a church soloist and theater pianist. While attending the University of Michigan, he was a member of a theatrical group known as "The Mimes" and composed student operettas. Mills worked as a musical arranger for the Isham Jones



During the war-time housing shortage the patriotic McGees rented their spare bedroom to defense plant worker Alice Darling. Alice was delightfully dense and used expressions such as 'Crim-in-y' and 'Creepers!' The role was played to perfection by Shirley Mitchell who was also remembered for her role as flirtatious Leila Ransom on The Great Gildersleeve program.

dance band and organized his own orchestra in Chicago in 1922. He entered radio in 1931 as musical director and conductor. The following year he was elevated to the position of general musical director of the Western Division of CBS. During World War II, Mills served as Bandmaster for the 31st U.S. Artillery Division. He succeeded Ted Weems as the band leader on the "Fibber McGee" program in 1938 and continued through 1953. On June 17, 1941 Jim Jordan dedicated the Fibber McGee broadcast to Mills, who was marking his 10,000th broadcast on that date. A gifted arranger and composer, Mills' many compositions include "Wing to Wing", which was used as a theme on the McGee show for many years. Mills passed away at the age of seventy-one on October 20, 1971.

## SHIRLEY MITCHELL

(Alice Darling, others)

Born in Toledo, Ohio on November 4, 1926. Began in show business in Toledo and Detroit, appearing on amateur shows. She then set out to break into radio in Chicago. Shirley moved on to California in 1942 and soon became one of radio's busiest young actresses. A fine comedienne, she was heard on most of the top comedy shows.

Among her many memorable characterizations are: 'Lelia Ransom' a flirtatious Southern belle (The Great Gildersleeve); 'Shirley Wirley' (Rudy Vallee Sealtest Show); 'Phoebe Peabody' (The Jack Carson Show). She was also the voice of 'Kitty Archer'(the Mouse) in the comedy-detective series 'McGarry and His Mouse.' Miss Mitchell played 'Alice Darling' on the Fibber McGee show from 1943 through 1946. She has since continued in motion pictures and television (voice overs, etc). Shirley presently resides in Beverly Hills, California and is a dedicated worker for SHARE an organization dedicated to helping exceptional children.

She is also active with the Young Musicians Foundation.



When Jim Jordan was forced to miss a broadcast on March 28, 1944 because he was in the hospital with pneumonia, Hal Peary as Gildersleeve, filled in for his 'little chum.'

## **DONALD NOVIS** (Vocalist)

Born in Hastings, England on March 30, 1907. At the age of two his parents took him to Canada to live. He studied languages and music in college. In 1927 Novis won an Atwater Kent radio audition. The lyric tenor made his air debut at station KWFI in Los Angeles. He was a featured vocalist on the Fibber McGee program during 1938/39 until he left to go on an extended concert tour. Novis had a fine sense of humor and occasionally spoke a few lines of dialogue on the McGee show. He passed away at the age of fifty-nine on July 23, 1966.

## **HAROLD "HAL" PEARY** (Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve - others)

Born in San Leandro, California on July 25, 1908. He made his radio debut at Station KLX at the age of thirteen, billed as "The Oakland Tribunes's Boy Caruso." He made his legitimate acting debut in 1925 and the following year appeared in a vaudeville act with Sylvia Breamer. Peary spent five years in comic opera, musical comedy, and stock companies on the West Coast and in the Orient. He returned to San Francisco to attend Santa Clara University and completed his education there. His debut as a radio actor came in 1929 on a program called "Roads to Romance." In 1930 he was signed to a six-month contract with NBC as a staff actor and singer. He soon began playing roles on programs such as "Little Orphan Annie." In 1935 he moved to Chicago and was soon heard on programs such as: "The First Nighter," "Grand Hotel," "Lights Out," "Girl Alone," and "The Story of Mary Marlin." During the summer of 1935, Peary was heard on a program called "Shoestring Castle" over WENR. It was sponsored by the Federal Housing Administration in order to inform listeners how the FHA could help them modernize their homes, or aid them in building new homes. On the "Tom Mix Straight Shooters" program, Peary played eight different characters. He joined the McGee program in 1937 and played many different characters before settling into the role of "Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve." The character was a popular fixture on the show until 1941 when Peary left for a spin-off series of his own, "The Great Gildersleeve." Peary has also appeared in many films including:



Don Quinn in his office. Note the typewriter where he created 'Smackout' and the 'McGee' scripts, through the spring of 1951.

Country Fair (1941), "Look Who's Laughing" (1941), and "Seven Days Leave" (1942).

He was starred in a series of Gildersleeve films: "The Great Gildersleeve" (1942), "Gildersleeve's Bad Day" (1943), "Gildersleeve on Broadway" (1943), and "Gildersleeve's Ghost" (1944). In television Peary was seen as June Havoc's boss in her comedy series, "Willy" (1954). In 1956 he emceed the "Waltz Varieties" program on KCOP-TV. He was signed by Hal Roach, Jr. in 1957 to play "Herb Woodley" in the "Blondie" television series. In 1957 Peary was seen as "Mayor LaTrivia" in the "Fibber McGee and Molly" television series. During 1953 Peary worked as a radio disc jockey in Los Angeles. On September 20, 1950 Peary debuted on the CBS comedy series "Honest Harold" on which he portrayed "Harold Hemp" who had a homemaker's program on the air. Peary also recorded children's stories for Capitol Records. He supplied the voice for Red Goose Shoes commercials and continued to do voice-overs for both radio and television commercials. Peary passed away at the age of 76 on March 30, 1985.

## DON QUINN (Writer)

Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on November 18, 1900. His first career was as a cartoonist and gag writer. His association with the Jordans began in 1931 when he wrote the SMACKOUT program for them. During 1933/34 he wrote comedy material for the "Olsen and Johnson's Swift Revue" heard on CBS. Quinn usually wore light-colored horn-rimmed glasses and had an owlsh look. His scripts for the McGee show were widely recognized for their quality and contribution to the success of the program. At his peak, he was the highest paid comedy writer in all radio with a weekly salary of approximately \$3,000. He left the McGee show in 1950 to create and write the "Halls of Ivy" series. Quinn won a Peabody Award for the series which was later brought to television. He co-authored a play with Arnold Marquis entitled "The Ballad of Will Rogers." During the last years of his life he worked on a collection of writings he titled, "Beware - Mad Doggerel!" He married Chicago newspaper and publicity writer, Edythe Dixon. They had a son and daughter. After a long illness he passed away at the age of sixty-seven on December 30, 1967.



Comedian/writer, Ransom Sherman, starred in 'Hap Hazard' which was the summer replacement show for Fibber McGee in 1941. Two years later, in September 1943, he became a regular on the McGee program and was heard in a variety of roles including 'Sigmund Wellington', the boastful manager of the Wistful Vista Bijou theater.

**ISABEL RANDOLPH**  
(Mrs. Abigail Uppington - others)

Born in Chicago on December 4, 1890 to theatrical parents. She was carried onstage by her mother when she was six months old. Isabel worked in vaudeville and acted in repertory theatre companies. She retired briefly in 1917 to marry J.C. Ryan and gave birth to two daughters, Leonore and Isabel. Widowed, with two young children to support, she returned to acting, via radio in 1932. By 1935 she had worked her way up to a featured spot on the "Welcome Valley" program. One year later she had the starring role in the NBC serial "Dan Harding's Wife." In addition, she was heard frequently on such shows as "Lights Out," "The First Nighter," and "The Story of Mary Marlin." Isabel joined the McGee show in 1936 and moved west with it in 1939. In addition to her radio work, she became very active in films in which she was often cast as society matrons. She left the McGee show in 1943 in order to concentrate on film and television work. On television she was seen on "I Love Lucy," "Our Miss Brooks," "The Robert Cummings Show," and "The Dick Van Dyke Show," before retiring in 1963. After a lengthy illness, she passed away at the age of eighty-three on January 11, 1973.

**RANSOM SHERMAN**  
(Sigmund Wellington - others)

Born in Appleton, Wisconsin on October 15, 1898. He entered radio in Chicago in 1923 and was heard on many early comedy shows. Sherman gained prominence in 1931 as one of the comedy trio, "The Three Doctors." He was also heard on "The Sunbrite Smile Parade" and "The Quicksilver Program." In 1937 Sherman created the "Club Matinee" program where he was later joined by Garry Moore. A prolific comedy writer, he wrote and starred in "Hap Hazard," the summer replacement show for the McGee program in 1941. For the spring season of 1942 Sherman had his own "Ransom Sherman Show" on CBS. He was added to the cast of the McGee show in 1943 where he was heard as "Sigmund Wellington," the snooty manager of the Bijou Theater. After leaving radio, Sherman made a number of films including: "The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer," "Gentlemen's Agreement," and "Always Together," in 1947; "Winter Meeting," "Are You With



During Marian's long absence due to illness, the character of the McGee's house boy 'Silly Watson' joined Fibber in many of his hijinks. "Silly" was played by the very versatile Hugh Studebaker.

It?," and "Whiplash", in 1948; "One Last Fling," and "Always Leave Them Laughing," in 1949; and "Pretty Baby" in 1950.

Today Sherman resides in Boulder City, Nevada.

## **HUGH STUDEBAKER**

(Silly Watson - others)

Born in Ridgeville, Indiana on May 31, 1900. His first work on radio was with a song and piano act in Council Bluffs, Iowa in 1928. Later he became one of the musical team, "Georgie and Porgie-The Breakfast Food Boys" at a Kansas City radio station. A versatile actor and musician, he once served as organist and announcer for Ted Malone's "Between the Bookends" poetry-reading program. Studebaker began to play dramatic parts in Chicago radio in 1933 and was heard on several of the major soap operas: "The Romance of Helen Trent," "Backstage Wife," "The Story of Mary Marlin," "Lucky Girl," "The Guiding Light," "Midstream," "The Right to Happiness," "The Road of Life," and "The Woman in White." He is probably best remembered for his long running role as "Dr. Bob Graham" on "Bachelor's Children." He played many varied roles ranging from kindly doctors and ministers, to showboat captains and villains. He was heard on top dramatic shows such as "Curtain Time," "The First Nighter," and "Show Boat." Studebaker was heard on many of the early McGee programs and was featured for some time as "Silly Watson," an unpaid houseboy. The role was quite a departure from his usual dramatic assignments. Studebaker married radio actress Bertina Congdon, who had been "The Dreamland Lady" on an early children's program aired from Winter Park, Florida over station WDBO. The pair met while both were performing on an early musical-drama program called "Happy Hollow" aired from station WMBC in Kansas City. By coincidence, Miss Congdon was heard as the heroine of the show, while Mr. Studebaker was more-or-less the villain of the piece. He passed away on May 6, 1978 at the age of seventy-eight.



Bill Thompson was a young dialect/comedian at the time he joined the program in January of 1936. He was heard on almost every show thereafter in roles such as The Old Timer, Horatio Boomer, Wallace Wimple and many others.

**BILL THOMPSON**  
(Horatio K. Boomer - The Old Timer -  
Wallace Wimple - many others)

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana on July 8, 1913. His parents performed in musical comedies and vaudeville. At the age of two, Thompson made his first stage appearance doing a tap dance. By age five, he was doing a single act billed as "Jackie Coogan's Double." In 1934 he entered a talent contest at NBC and won a contract with the network with a routine he called "International Parade" in which he spoke in ten different dialects. Thompson's early radio appearances were on "The Saturday Night Jamboree," "The Breakfast Club," and "The Hoofingham Show." He joined the "Fibber McGee" show in 1936 and remained a top favorite for many years. In addition to his radio work, Thompson supplied the voice for several of Walt Disney's animated cartoon characters: "Peter Pan" ("Mr. Smee"). "Donald Duck" cartoons (the park ranger); he also made vocal contributions to "Sleeping Beauty," "Lady and the Tramp," and "Alice in Wonderland." In 1957 he left show business to pursue a business career with the Union Oil Company. In his spare time, he served as President of the Southern California Area Boy Scouts of America. He passed away after a brief illness on July 15, 1971 at the age of fifty-eight.

**CECIL UNDERWOOD**  
(Producer)

Born in Vienna, Missouri on January 3, 1900. He entered radio as an announcer at KHQ in Spokane, Washington in 1926. Later he became a producer for the Western Division of NBC at San Francisco and was transferred to Hollywood in 1934. Underwood produced radio programs for: Ken Murray, Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante, Bob Hope, and Jack Benny. He produced the "Fibber McGee" program from 1937 to 1945. He was also one of the directors of the "The Great Gildersleeve" series. He left radio in 1945 to head the radio division of an advertising agency and retired in 1959. He passed away at the age of seventy-six on September 27, 1976.



Gildersleeve appears to be placing Fibber 'on the carpet' as Molly and Mrs. Uppington stand by. LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING. (RKO, 1941).

## **HERB VIGRAN** (Herbert Appel - others)

Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1910. He went to Hollywood in 1933 and made his film debut in "Happy Landings," playing the part of a radio operator. Vigran moved to New York and worked in radio with roles on series such as: "Father Knows Best," "Tales of the Texas Rangers," "Sara's Private Caper," "Family Skeleton," and many others. Vigran joined the McGee show as "Herbert Appel" in December 1949. He was also a frequent cast member of both the radio and television "Jack Benny" programs.

In 1946 he starred in his own radio series "The Sad Sack."

Mr. Vigran passed away at the age of 76 on November 28, 1986.

## **TED WEEMS** (Orchestra leader)

Born in Pitcairin, Pennsylvania on September 26, 1901. During his high school years, he played violin and trombone and directed the student band. He later formed a small touring dance band with his brother, Art. Weems auditioned for a job as band leader at the L'Aiglon Restaurant in Philadelphia. He not only got the job, but within a few months was a co-owner of the restaurant, as well. Always obliging, he adapted his repertoire to please the people and became one of the favorite college dance bands. The Weems band played most of the important clubs and hotels and ventured into radio. The band played at the Inaugural Ball for President Harding. During the 30's, Weems became a very popular recording artist. One of his band's biggest record hits was the 1931 tune "Heartaches" with whistling supplied by Elmo Tanner. Originally the record sold only the usual number of copies, but in 1947 a North Carolina disc jockey found an old copy of the record and began to feature it on his show. Soon other disc jockeys across the land followed suit and the record became a belated national hit, selling more than a million copies. In 1931 Weems and his band were sponsored for a series of thirteen broadcasts from Chicago's Aragon Ballroom, by the Johnson Wax Company. The Weems band joined the "Fibber McGee" program in 1936 and were heard through early 1938. Weems served in the Merchant Marines during 1942/44. Among his musical compositions were many novelty tunes such as: "The Martins and the Coys," "The Toyland Band,"



Harlow Wilcox, native of Omaha, Nebraska delivered the commercials for Johnson Wax products for seventeen years. His spiels were glibly pleasant and never an intrusion. Fibber often referred to him as 'Harpo.'

"Jig Time," "Three Shif'less Skonks," and "The One-Man Band." Weems is fondly remembered by many as one of the kindest men in the big band business. He passed away at the age of sixty on September 24, 1960.

## HARLOW WILCOX (Announcer)

Born in Omaha, Nebraska on March 12, 1900. His father played cornet in the Ringling Brothers Circus band, and his sister, Hazel, was a concert violinist. Wilcox studied voice for three years and left home in his late teens to try for a career on the stage. To support his theatrical goals, he sometimes worked as a salesman of electrical equipment. His first radio work was at station WGES in Chicago in 1930. In March of 1932 the young announcer got a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do some great on-the-spot news coverage. Late one night while he was on the air, he received a bulletin over the network's monitor wire service, and promptly cut in on a remote dance band broadcast to announce the story of the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. In January 1934 Wilcox was signed by NBC as a staff announcer. He announced for shows such as: "Old Gold Don Ameche Show," "Maxwell House Coffee Time," "Myrt and Marge," "Amos 'N Andy," "Attorney-at-Law," "Blondie," "Truth or Consequences," and "Suspense." He delivered the commercials for Johnson Wax on the "Fibber McGee" program for seventeen years, 1935 through 1952. In 1948 Wilcox headed the television department of Rocket Pictures, Inc. He passed away at the age of sixty on September 24, 1960.



Versatile actress Betty Winkler played a number of roles, including 'Flossie, the secretary'.

## BETTY WINKLER

(Flossie, the secretary - others)

Born in Berwick, Pennsylvania on April 19, 1914. She studied acting at the Cleveland Playhouse and entered radio in 1933. Miss Winkler played leading roles in several soap operas including: "Girl Alone" and "Joyce Jordan-Girl Interne." She met her future husband, actor George Keane, when both were appearing on the "Rosemary" serial drama. When the long-running stage success "Abie's Irish Rose" was made into a continuing radio drama series, she was heard in the title role. First appeared on the "Fibber McGee" show in 1937 and became a member of the regular cast in 1938. She has taught at the New School for Social Research for more than fifteen years. In recent years she has worked as a co-therapist with Dr. Edward Whitmont, noted Jungian Psychoanalyst. Mrs. Keane lectures and has written the book, "Sensing: Letting Yourself Live."



Jim and Marian Jordan ("Fibber McGee and Molly").

## APPENDIX I

### MARIAN AND JIM JORDAN PERFORMANCES SUMMARY

Marian and Jim Jordan are known to have performed over 11,000 times on stage, screen and over the air waves. This appendix summarizes these achievements.

#### VAUDEVILLE AND STAGE PERFORMANCES

Debut: September 1917  
Through: 1981  
Ca. 4,100 live performances

#### RADIO PERFORMANCES

Debut: 1923  
Through: 1981  
Ca. 6,900 aired performances

#### THE O'HENRY TWINS - Station WIBO

Debut: 1926  
Through: 1926  
Ca. 26 aired performances

#### MARIAN AND JIM IN SONGS

Debut: 1927  
Through: Aug. 1934  
Ca. 1,600 aired performances



Frank Pittman (left) supervises rehearsal. Marian and Jim pay apt attention, as Don Quinn and Phil Leslie confer in the background. NBC's Studio "C", Hollywood and Vine (1949).

## THE AIR SCOUTS - Station WENR

Debut: October 3, 1927  
Through: December 31, 1929  
Ca. 491 aired performances

## THE SMITH FAMILY - Stations WENR & WMAQ

Debut: Sunday, June 9, 1929  
Through: April 3, 1932  
Ca. 156 aired performances + 82 repeats

## SMACKOUT - Stations WMAQ (CBS), WMAQ (NBC), WENR, & KYW

Debut: Monday, March 3, 1931  
Through: Saturday, August 3, 1935  
Ca. 948 programs

## FARMER RUSK'S TOP O' THE MORNING

Debut: Monday, April 27, 1931  
Through: Saturday, February 27, 1932  
264 programs

## THE MARQUETTE SHOW - Station WMAQ

Debut: Wednesday, July 22, 1931  
Through: June 1, 1932  
46 programs

## MARIAN AND JIM - Station WMAQ

Replacement for Ransom Sherman's THREE DOCTORS  
12 programs in August 1931

## MISTER TWISTER, MIND TRICKSTER (With Jim only) - Station WMAQ.

Debut: June 24, 1932  
Through: November 10, 1933  
103 programs



HERE WE GO AGAIN (RKO, 1942)-Fibber doesn't believe his ears as Wallace Wimple (Bill Thompson) tries to explain the workings of his aircraft. Molly, too, seems to be a bit incredulous.

KALTENMEYER'S KINDERGARTEN - Station WMAQ  
(with Marian & Jim in cast)

Debut: October 14, 1932  
Through: September 1936  
Ca. 180 programs

MARIAN AND JIM - Station WENR (NBC)

Debut: May 24, 1934  
Through: October 18, 1934  
29 programs

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY PROGRAM - NBC

Debut: Tuesday, April 16, 1935  
Through: Sunday, August 2, 1959  
1,595 programs

(Half hour series; weekly)

Debut: Tuesday, April 16, 1935  
Through: Tuesday, June 30, 1953  
739 programs

(Quarter hour series; five days/week)

Debut: Monday, October 5, 1953  
Through: Friday, March 23, 1956  
578 programs

(Five Minute Weekend Monitor series; Five vignettes each Sat. & Sun.)

Debut: Saturday, June 1, 1957  
Through: Sunday, September 6, 1959  
278 five-part programs

(Reruns of Five Minute Weekend Monitor series; each Sat. & Sun.)

Debut: 1960  
Through: 1961  
Ca. 32 five-part programs (16 weekends)



Molly prepares to cut the program's 15th Anniversary Cake in the presence of all the Wistful Vista players and staff. Left to right are an unidentified actor, Harlow Wilcox, Billy Mills, Budd Linn\*, Jon Dodson\*, Fibber, Phil Leslie, Molly, Ken Darby\*, Don Quinn, Gale Gordon, Bill Thompson, Rad Robinson\*, Dick LeGrand, Arthur Q. Bryan (\*: members of The King's Men Quarter).

**FIBBER McGEE AND THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF RADIO**  
(Syndicated series aired on 55 stations across U.S.A.)

Debut: Sunday, March 31, 1974  
Through: Sunday, June 23, 1974  
7 programs (bi-weekly)

**RADIO APPEARANCES AND SPECIALS OF MARIAN AND  
JIM JORDAN - all networks and many independent stations**

Debut: 1923  
Through: 1984  
Ca. 1,500 programs



Molly and Fibber look on as Charles "Buddy" Rogers and Betty Grable are about to 'tie the knot'. Scene from **THIS WAY PLEASE** (1937).

## APPENDIX II

### FILM APPEARANCES OF MARIAN AND JIM JORDAN

#### THIS WAY PLEASE

(1937 Paramount Pictures)

Running Time: 70 minutes.

Directed by Robert Florey, Produced by Mel Shauer. Based on a story by Maxwell Shane, Bill Thomas. Screenplay, Grant Garrett, Seena Owena and Howard J. Green. Songs by Sam Coslow, Frederick Hollander, Al Siegel, Jock and George Gray. Choreography by LeRoy Prinz. Music director Borris Morros. Camera, Harry Fischbeck.

CAST: Charles "Buddy" Rogers (Brad Morgan), Mary Livingstone (Maxine Barry). Betty Grable (Jane Morrow). Ned Sparks (Inky Wells), Jim and Marian Jordan (Fibber McGee and Molly), Porter Hall (S.J. Crawford), Lee Bowman (Stu Randall), Cecil Cunningham (Miss Eberhardt), Wally Vernon (Bumps), Romo Vincent (Trumps), Jerry Bergen (Mumps), Rufe Davis (Sound Effects Man).

SYNOPSIS: Movie usherette Betty Grable gets a crush on visiting movie star, Buddy Rogers. Film introduced radio personalities Mary Livingstone and Jim and Marian Jordan to the screen.



LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING (RKO, 1941). Director Alan Dwan, Charlie McCarthy, Lucille Ball, Fibber and Molly.

## LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING

(1941 RKO Pictures)

Running Time: 78 minutes.

Director-Producer, Allan Dwan. Screenplay, James V. Kern.  
Music Director, Roy Webb. Camera, Frank Redman.

CAST: Edgar Bergen (himself) with Charlie McCarthy, Jim and Marian Jordan (Fibber McGee and Molly), Lucille Ball (Julie Patterson), Lee Bonnell (Jerry), Dorothy Lovett (Marge), Harold Peary (Gildersleeve), Isabel Randolph (Mrs. Uppington), Walter Baldwin (Bill), Neil Hamilton (Hilary Horton). Charles Halton (Cudahy), Harlow Wilcox (Mr. Collins), Spencer Charters (Motel Manager), Jed Prouty (Mayor), George Cleveland (Mayor Kelsey), Bill Thompson (Veteran). Sterling Holloway (Rusty, the Soda Jerk). Florence Wright (Evelyn), Harlan Briggs (Aide to Mayor), Arthur Q. Bryan (Aide to Mayor), Charles Lane (Club Secretary), Edna Holland (Mrs. Hargrave), Dell Henderson (Mr. Wentworth), Jack George (Orchestra Leader), Matty Kemp (Harry), Louise Curry (Janey), Louis Payne (Butler), Joe Hickey (Dancing Partner), Donald Kerr (Father), Sally Cairns (Girl), Eleanor Counts, Yvonne Chenal (Bits), Dorothy Lloyd (Maisie/Matilda).

SYNOPSIS: Vacationing Edgar Bergen (with Charlie McCarthy) experiences engine trouble while flying and is forced to land in Wistful Vista. He becomes involved in helping Fibber McGee and Molly in promoting a new plane factory and defeating a couple of land sharks. Some of the best comedy moments occurred when Fibber tried to fix an automatic dishwasher only to have the machine hurl dishes in every direction for several minutes.

Also several delightful phone conversations between "Teeny" and her romantic interest in the film, Charlie McCarthy.



HERE WE GO AGAIN (RKO, 1942). Fibber and Molly dine out to celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary. Looking on are Edgar Bergen and Ginny Simms.

## HERE WE GO AGAIN

(1942 RKO Pictures)

Running Time: 77 minutes.

Directed by Allan Dwan. Based on story by Paul Gerard Smith. Screenplay by Paul Gerard Smith and Joe Bigelow.

CAST: Edgar Bergen (himself) with Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd, Jim and Marian Jordan (Fibber McGee and Molly), Hal Peary (Gildersleeve), Isabel Randolph (Mrs. Uppington), Bill Thompson (Wallace Wimple), Gale Gordon (Otis Cadwallader); also featuring Ginny Simms and Ray Noble and his orchestra.

SYNOPSIS: A most preposterous plot. The McGees are celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary, and in honor of the occasion Fibber takes Molly to an expensive resort hotel, which he can ill afford. By coincidence, also staying at the same resort are Gildersleeve and his pretty young sister (played by Ginny Simms) as well as Mrs. Uppington and Wallace Wimple. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy are also guests at the resort. Bergen is engaged in a scientific expedition in search of a certain type of silk moth, to aid the war effort. He takes an occasional free minute or two to romance Miss Gildersleeve. The McGees bump into Otis Cadwallader, an old beau of Molly's who is now a wheeler-dealer and tells Fibber about a synthetic gasoline that Wallace Wimple has discovered. McGee is badly in need of cash to pay the hotel bill, and lets himself be conned into getting Bergen to trust him with a check for \$25,000 to buy a half interest in Wimple's formula, which is really worthless as a fuel, for it ruins the motor. Bergen gives Fibber a check but asks him not to use it until he has located the silk moth he is searching for. Cadwallader cleverly manages to dupe Fibber and gets the check. That evening a gala floor show is staged and Charlie McCarthy sings "Delicious Delirium." Mrs. Uppington, dressed as an Indian, gives a very melodramatic reading of Hiawatha. Meanwhile, Bergen and McCarthy have disguised themselves as a squaw and papoose and entered an Indian reservation in search of the moth. They interrupt a ceremonial dance and wind up doing a wild conga. Bergen finally finds the moth he has been seeking, only to learn that its strands of silk are too brittle to use. Some of Wimple's synthetic gas is accidentally spilled on the silk and magically changes it into usable silk. Fibber, meanwhile, tries to get Bergen's check back from Otis, but the cad steals the McGees' horse, Lillian, and makes a mad dash away from the scene. Fibber hurriedly borrows a



Can this be the McGees from 79 Wistful Vista? As they appeared in the 1944 RKO film HEAVENLY DAYS.

wagon, not knowing that it is filled with a cargo of TNT. The situation grows more preposterous by the second. But Fibber finally gets the check and when he attempts to return it to Bergen, he declines, saying he wants to buy the half interest in Wimple's formula after all, for it is needed to make the silk usable. McGee manages to pay the hotel bill - and all ends well.

## HEAVENLY DAYS

(1944 RKO Pictures)

Running Time: 72 minutes.

Directed by Howard Estabrook. Produced by Robert Fellows. Based on story by Howard Estabrook. Screenplay by Howard Estabrook and Don Quinn. Music by Leigh Harline. Musical Director, C. Bakaleinikoff. Camera. Roy Hunt.

CAST: Jim and Marian Jordan (Fibber McGee and Molly), Eugene Pallette (Senator Bigbee), Gordon Oliver (Dick), Raymond Walburn (Mr. Popham). Barbara Hale (Angie), Don Douglas (Dr. Gallup). Frieda Inescourt (Mrs. Clark), Irving Bacon (Butler), The King's Men (Themselves), Emory Parnell (Detective), Charles Trowbridge (Mr. Clark), Chester Carlisle, Bert Moorhouse (Sergeants-at-Arms), J.M. Sullivan (Detective), Henry Hall, Ed Peil, James Farley, Lloyd Ingraham, Fred Fox, Brandon Beach, James Carlisle, J.O. Bowler, Lou Payne, Henry Herbert, Ed Mortimer, Wilbur Mack, Joseph Girard, Dick Rush, John Ince. (Senators). Ed Stanley (Vice President Wallace). Harry Humphre (Southern Senator), George Reed (Servant), Norman Mayes (Waiter). Helena Benda (Czech Lady). Bertha Feducah (French Lady). William Yip (Chinese Man), Esther Zeitlan (Russian Lady), John Duncan (Boy), Clinton Rosemond (Black Servant), Eva McKensie (Clerk), Teddy Infuhr (Czech Boy), Oleg Balaeff (Russian Boy), Pat Prest (Dutch Girl), Maurice Tausin (French Boy), Dena Penn (Belgian Girl), Walter Soo Hoo (Chinese Boy), Yvette Duguay (Greek Girl). Josel Davis (English Boy),. Eddie Clark (Scout), Larry Wheat (Butler), Bryant Washburn (Airport Official). Lane Chandler (Minute Man), Gil Perkins (Confederate Soldier), Ken Ferrel (Union Soldier), Selmer Jackson (Sunday Editor), Rosemary LaPlanche, Margie Stewart (Bits), Sheldon Jett (Big Fat Man), Richard Thorpe (World War I Soldier). Erville Alderson (Farmer), Glen Stephens, John Benson (Military Police), Ronald Gaye, Erwin Kaiser (Drum Boys), John Elliot, Charles Griffin, Elmer Jerome (Men). Virginia Sale, Elaine Riley (Secretaries), Molio Sheron (Russian).



The McGees of *Wistful Vista* arrive in Washington, D.C. and are greeted by a committee headed by pretty Barbara Hale (remember her as Pery Mason's secretary?) Still from *HEAVENLY DAYS* (RKO, 1944).

**SYNOPSIS:** At the request of a cousin, the McGees visit the nation's capital to participate in the post war planning program. Fibber is given a pass to the Senate gallery where he rises to address the august body on the subject "What the man in the street really wants." As a result, he becomes a national celebrity. He enlists the aid of Dr. Gallup's poll to locate "The Average Man." Gallup chooses none other than Fibber himself, but he rebels at being called "average." Later when McGee learns that he cannot vote in the pending election because he has forgotten to register, he realizes that he is indeed very human, and "average," after all.

### ALL-STAR BOND RALLY

(1945 20th Century Fox)

Running Time: 18 minutes.

Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck to promote the 7th War Loan Drive.

Screenplay by Don Quinn.

**CAST:** Many top performers, as themselves: Bob Hope, Betty Grable, Harpo Marx, Frank Sinatra, Harry James and his orchestra, Jim and Marian Jordan as Fibber McGee and Molly.

**SYNOPSIS:** The McGees attend a variety show hosted by Bob Hope.



Molly and Fibber, assisted by dour comedian Ned Sparks defy the laws of gravity in a matchstick balancing act. THIS WAY PLEASE (1937).

## IS EVERYBODY LISTENING?

(1947 20th Century Fox)

Running Time: 70 minutes.

Volume 14, No. 1 of the "March of Time" series. Series was produced every four weeks by the editors of "Time" and "Life" magazines and distributed by 20th Century Fox.

CAST: Film clips showing Jim and Marian Jordan (Fibber McGee and Molly), Parker Fennelly and Fred Allen (Titus Moody and Friend), Walter Winchell, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Arturo Toscani, and other clips of THE TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR and various soap operas.

SYNOPSIS: "Go with the March of Time's new film - through the doors marked 'Silence - On The Air' - to see and hear your favorite stars and programs, your pet-hate jingles... get mad at radio's inanities, cheer the swell jobs it can do, laugh and listen and learn about the youthful, lusty, screwy broadcasting business. Be sure to see the controversial, fast-moving IS EVERYBODY LISTENING?"

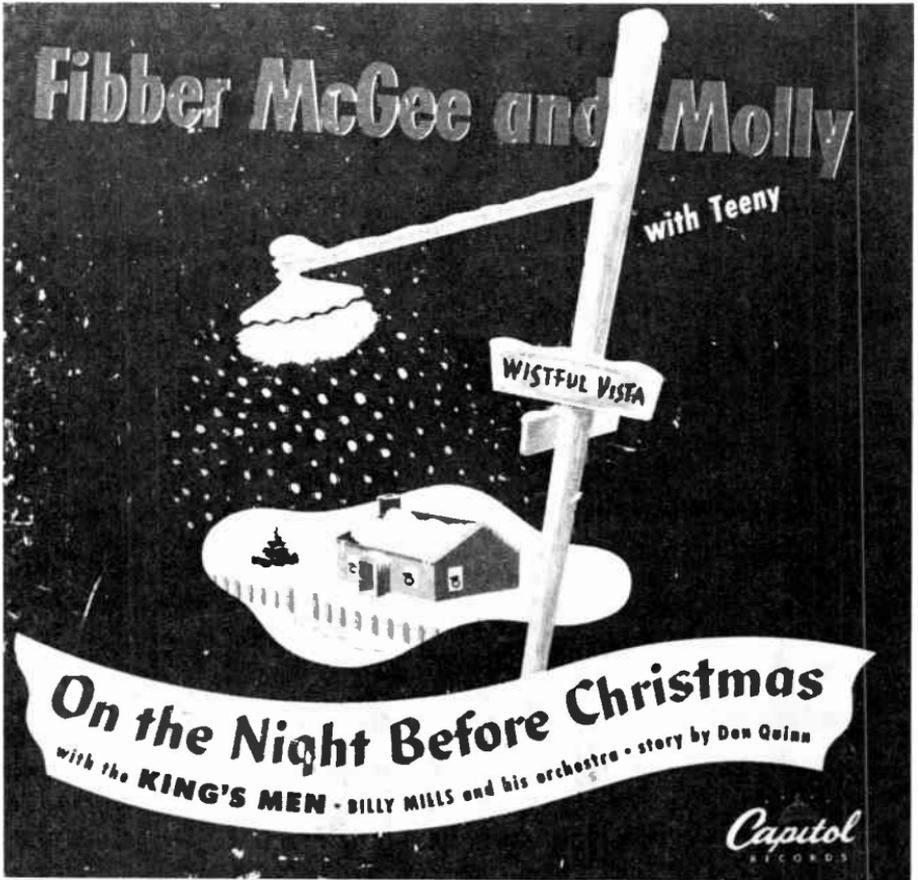
## NBC: A SALUTE TO THE STARS

(1947 NBC)

Running Time: 30 minutes. Most details unknown.

CAST: Many National Broadcasting Company stars participated in this movie short made for public theaters. Fibber McGee and Molly were among the host of bright stars publicized by the Network.

SYNOPSIS: No details known.



Cover of Capitol Records album "On The Night Before Christmas" starring Fibber McGee and Molly, Teeny, The Kings Men and Bill Mills and his orchestra. (1945).

## APPENDIX III

### RECORDINGS

In 1945 Capitol Records released a 3-record 78 rpm set of recordings entitled "Fibber McGee and Molly - With Teeny - On the Night Before Christmas." The album also featured the Kings Men and Billy Mills and his orchestra. It was Capitol Album #CC20. The script was by Don Quinn. Special music composed and arranged by Ken Darby.

The notes contained on the cover of the Capitol Album reads: *"FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY have become an American institution. More than a great comedy team, they reflect the hopes and ambitions, as well as the daily tribulations, of the American people. Never before in this great nation's history has there been a more popular, a more beloved couple. Millions of the McGee family's fellow citizens adjust their radios every week to keep pace with Wistful Vista's residents-the simplicity and honesty of these NBC programs has given James and Marian Jordan the largest weekly listening audience in the history of radio. Capitol is privileged to present this Christmas album by Fibber and Molly. The records contained between these covers mark their first appearance on discs. Acknowledgement is gratefully accorded S.C. Johnson and Sons, manufacturers of Johnson Wax products; Don Quinn, the writer; Frank A. Pittman, producer, and the many famous artists who participate in this prize package of Capitol records."*

In 1947, Monitor, the Most Distinguished Family of Home Appliances, released a series of recorded excerpts of various radio broadcasts. Titled "TOP TEN ALBUMS," each set contained four 78 rpm recordings. Personalities covered in the series were: Amos 'N Andy, Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Burns and Allen, Eddie Cantor, Ed "Archie" Gardner (Duffy's Tavern) and Fibber McGee and Molly.



**FIBBER McGEE & MOLLY**

the world beloved residents of 79 Wistful Vista whose humor is as American as apple pie and twice as satisfying, now bring you on these special phonograph records for home use... a series of riotous rib ticklers...

*Yours  
James I Jordan  
Marian I Jordan*

● JIM AND MARIAN JORDAN met at choir practice when Jim was seventeen and Marian sixteen. And the first fresh delight of that boy-and-girl courtship—the down-to-earth coziness of small town America—are the very core of the comedy that provides clarity of Fibber McGee & Molly.

For as the bumptious Fibber who knows all the answers stumbles and fumbles his way through life to the gently caustic comments of his loving wife, Molly, the McGees bring you the laughable, lovable doings of the great American family residing at 79 Wistful Vista.

In bringing these special phonograph recordings to your home, Fibber and Molly wish to thank their collaborators, Don Quinn, their author-partner, Bill Thompson, Harlow Wilcox, Jim Backus, Arthur Q. Bryan, Gale Gordon, Virginia Gordon and the Billy Mills Orchestra.

The Fibber McGee album was Number Seven of the series. The excerpts of programs contained in the album were: (1) "A Fascinatin' Hunk of Natural History;" (2) "A Visit to the Dairy" (two parts); (3) "It's All Greek;" (4) "Strictly Off the Record;" (5) "Wallace Wimpole (sic) Drops In;" (6) "A Few Notes on Piano Tuning" (two parts).

The notes contained on the inside cover of the album read: *"FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY The World Beloved residents of 79 Wistful Vista whose humor is as American as apple pie and twice as satisfying, now bring you on these special phonograph records for home use, a series of riotous rib ticklers... Jim and Marian Jordan met at choir practise when Jim was seventeen and Marian sixteen. And the first fresh delight of that boy and girl courtship, the down-to-earth goodness of small town America are the very core of the tremendous popularity of Fibber McGee and Molly. For as the bumptious Fibber who knows all the answers, stumbles and fumbles his way through life to the gently caustic comments of his loving wife, Molly, the McGees bring you the laughable, lovable doings of the great American family residing at 79 Wistful Vista. In bringing these special phonograph recordings to your home, Fibber and Molly, wish to thank their collaborators, Don Quinn, their author-partner, Bill Thompson, Harlow Wilcox, Jim Backus, Arthur Q. Bryan, Gale Gordon, Virginia Gordon and the Billy Mills orchestra."*

The back cover contains this message from Fibber and Molly: *"Folks... We're glad to have this opportunity to welcome you as permanent guest at Wistful Vista through your enjoyment of these phonograph records. And whenever you visit our modest cottage you'll find our friend and partner-collaborator, Don Quinn, who is as much responsible for the fun and laughter as ...*

*Yours - James Jordan Marian I. Jordan"*

At various other times other recordings have been released of old broadcasts.

### RADIOLA Label:

"Fibber McGee and Molly" #MR-1055 (Comedy Series No. 20 Release No. 55) 12" disc containing complete broadcasts 'Fibber's Closet' (March 12, 1940) 'I Can Get It For You Wholesale' (December 9, 1941)

FOR YEAR 'ROUND CHEER-

SING RECORDS THIS YEAR

**Fibber McGee and Molly**  
with Teeny

WISTFUL WITA

**On the Night Before Christmas**  
with the KING'S MEN - BILLY WELLS and his orchestra - story by Don Quinn

Capitol RECORDS

*From Hollywood*

Capitol, in the heart of Hollywood, is unique in its wealth of stage, screen and radio talent. Currently, Capitol is proud to present another *first*...this album by lovable Fibber McGee and Molly. Ideal for Christmas giving... for year 'round cheer. At your favorite record store...

**\$2.75\***



MARGARET O'BRIEN tells "Two Stories for Children" **\$2.75\***

THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE, HAL PEARY, in Three Fairy Tales . . . . . **\$3.50\***

COWBOY TEX RITTER in "Stories for Children" **\$2.50\***

FAMILIAR HYMNS, sung by St. Luke's Choristers **\$2.50\***

CHRISTMAS CAROLS, sung by St. Luke's Choristers **\$2.50\***

Watch for Capitol's New Phonographs!

Capitol's complete line of portable and table models! electronic phonographs brings you new miracles in tonal brilliance, clarity, balance.

Capitol RECORDS

FROM HOLLYWOOD

SUNSET AND VINE

1945

(1945)

GOLDEN AGE Label:

"Fibber McGee & Molly - Tall Tales Out of Fibber's Famous Closet" 12" disc containing complete broadcasts "Doc Gamble Day" and "Canoe Ride"

MURRAY HILL RADIO THEATRE Label:

"Fibber McGee and Molly" Set of 3 12" discs containing complete broadcasts "Elk's Club Smoker" "Home for Sale" "Bill Collecting" 3 others.

NOSTALGIA LANE Label:

"Fibber McGee and Molly" #NL 1006 12" disc containing complete broadcasts of "Fibber's Closet" (March 22, 1949) and "Mr. Mysterious" (July 6, 1948)

THE JOHNSON WAX PROGRAM WITH - FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY

Volume I "Christmas 1947"; Volume II "Doghouse 1939"; Volume III "Picnic 1950"; Volume IV "Uncle 1940"

THE LONGINES SYMPHONETTE SOCIETY Label:

"THE GOLDEN MEMORIES OF RADIO" Set of six 12" discs Narrated by Jack Benny and Frank Knight Record Three Side 3 #LWS 515 Contained excerpts of an old Fibber McGee and Molly broadcast with Jim and Marian Jordan and Bill Thompson. The record set was produced and written by John W. Day Directed by Art Hanna.

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**CHARLES STUMPF** -- Born in a very small town in northeastern Pennsylvania. He has worked professionally in theatre and films. Television credits include the Misterogers show and the leading role in 'The Butler Did It' featured on HBO. He is also heard as Sheriff Ed Hobbs on the syndicated radio series, Willow Crossing. Mr. Stumpf is the recipient of the Allen Rockford Award presented by the Friends of Old Time Radio. A noted historian, Mr. Stumpf has written dozens of articles on old time radio and is the author of several books, including *Ma Perkins*, *Little Orphan Annie* and *Hi-Yo, Silver!*; *From Static to Stereo* and *A History of Television Westerns*. Charlie's latest venture - a memorabilia shop.

**TOM PRICE** -- Born in St. Helena, California. Graduated from San Francisco State University where he earned both his B.A. and M.A. Tom teaches U.S. History and Geography in Salinas, California. He first met Jim Jordan in May, 1979 and later conducted a number of personal interviews. He also interviewed writers Phil Leslie and Tom Koch, as well as Ken Darby of the Kings Men, Gale Gordon, Frank Nelson and Hal (Great Gildersleeve) Peary. Tom has written and published: *Radio Program Time Lines 1920-1980*; *Performance logs of Marian and Jim Jordan and the Kings Men*, as well as *Fibber McGee's Closet: The Ultimate Log of Fibber McGee and Molly*; and, *The Ultimate Log of Suspense*.

Mr. Stumpf and Mr. Price collaborated on *HEAVENLY DAYS - the Story of Fibber McGee and Molly*, working from opposite ends of the country, exchanging tons of correspondence and reference materials. Tom collected extensive reference materials and Charlie analyzed them and did the writing. They listened to tapes of every available McGee broadcast and carefully noted first appearances of all major cast members, as well as character development. In honor of Don Quinn, their manuscript is well peppered with amusing alliterations. The authors' combined efforts represents a thoroughly researched project, resulting in a book complete to the most minute detail. Both are quick to say 'it was a labor of love.'

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