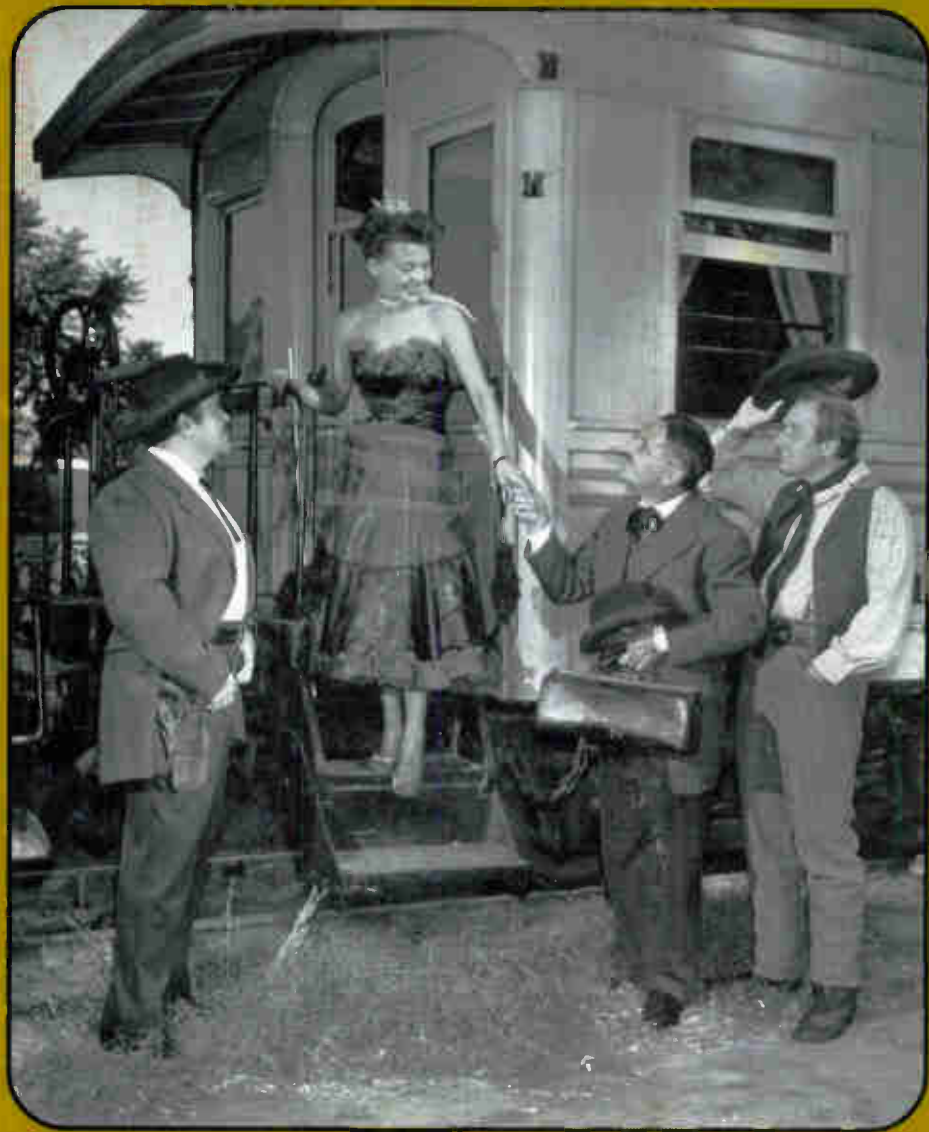


CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST

AND
RADIO
GUIDE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 1999



William Conrad, Georgia Ellis, Howard McNear, Parley Baer

GUNSMOKE

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Hello, Out There in Radioland!

In the Tuesday, June 16, 1970 edition of the *Chicago Daily News*, Robert J. Herguth wrote the following:

Nearly 200 oldtimers from the great years of Chicago radio serials will party here Tuesday evening.

The 200 will reminisce about the days when Little Orphan Annie originated from Chicago, along with Jack Armstrong, and Sky King, and Vic and Sade, and lots more.

The party is being sponsored at Sages East Restaurant, 181 E. Lake Shore Drive, by owner Gene Sage. Gene used to sit spellbound by the radio as a kid, listening to the serials, letting his imagination do the job better than color TV ever can.

The party will mix Little Orphan Annie (Mrs. Shirley Bell Cole) with Jack Armstrong's sidekick Billy (Asst. State's Atty. John Gannon) and Sky King (Earl Nightengale) and others, like Irna Phillips, who wrote Today's Children, Guiding Light, The Woman in White, Road of Life and The Right to Happiness.

Providing a backdrop Tuesday night will be a superfan of oldtime radio. He's youngish Chuck Schaden of Morton Grove, a newspaper editor whose hobby is collecting and trading tapes of the old shows with other radio fans. He'll play his tapes at the party, and interview old-timers for his weekly "Those Were The Days" radio show on WNMP.

* * *

And that's where we were back in 1970, a few days after our seventh *Those Were The Days* program... at Sages Restaurant, interviewing Chicago radio personalities.

On August 7, 1999, when we do our fifteen hundredth *Those Were The Days* program, we're going to fondly recall that evening 29 years ago.

They were the first interviews we did and you can imagine the thrill it was to meet and talk with those Chicago radio performers after hearing them on the air for years.

About a year later, in in May, 1971, a number of Chicago radio stars came to our Evanston, Illinois studio to present a live re-creation of a *Ma Perkins* broadcast. We'll have that as part of our *TWTD* program number 1,500 as well.

We hope you will enjoy reliving a part of our personal broadcast history.

Thanks for listening.

—Chuck Schaden



GUNSMOKE

BY STEVE DARNALL

For most of the Golden Age of radio, the western was considered pretty much a juvenile domain. The stories were simple-- usually conflicts between obvious good guys and obvious bad guy-- and while some off the shows rated high with adults as well, their appeal lay more in the larger-than-life characters (e.g. the Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy and the Cisco Kid) than in evoking any real sense of the West.

Then in 1952, a new Western rode into town. The saga of a Marshal trying to keep the peace in the otherwise untamed territory of Dodge City, Kansas, this show was *Gunsmoke*. By all rights, it shouldn't have had a chance, coming in towards the tail end of the Golden Age of Radio. Yet it lasted for nine years, changing our idea of what Westerns could do. It wouldn't be a great stretch to suggest it changed our ideas of what *radio* could do.

The saga of *Gunsmoke* actually began several years earlier, with the pairing of producer Norman Macdonnell and writer

Steve Darnall is a free-lance writer from Chicago. He would like to acknowledge Suzanne and Gabor Barabas' Gunsmoke: A Complete History, John Dunning's On The Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio, and Leonard Maltin's The Great American Broadcast, all of which were invaluable in assembling this article.

John Meston. Macdonnell was responsible for several critically-celebrated (if often unsponsored) dramatic shows, chief among them the outstanding anthology shows *Escape* and *Romance*. (He also produced *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe*, a smart, violent detective series that starred actor Gerald Mohr.)

In 1950, Macdonnell began working with John Meston, a network censor-turned-writer who had grown bored with telling people what not to write and decided to try writing some stories of his own. One of them, "Wild Jack Rhett," was performed on *Escape*. This western drama starred actor John Dehner in the title role, and featured Parley Baer, Howard McNear and



Writer John Meston, left, with producer-director Norman Macdonnell

William Conrad.

The show was satisfying enough to lead Macdonnell and Meston to contemplate a Western that would avoid the clichés of B-movies and aim for the adult audience that appreciated dramas like *Escape*.

With "Pagosa," which aired on *Romance* in 1951, it was obvious that Macdonnell and Meston had the concept for *Gunsmoke*, if not the framework, more or less in place. "Pagosa" starred William Conrad as Jeff Spain, a retired Marshal whose efforts to stake a land claim are thwarted until he agrees to don the badge again.

In keeping with the series' title, "Pagosa" featured Georgia Ellis as Jeff Spain's love interest. Around this same time, CBS was also contemplating an adult Western. Network President William S. Paley had been a fan of the *Philip Marlowe* series; when that show left the air for good in 1951, he suggested that the network try a drama along the lines of a "Philip Marlowe in the old West."

The network had actually flirted with the idea before; in 1949, two audition recordings had been made for a potential series called *Gunsmoke*. One starred Rye Billsbury (the last of the Mr. First Nighters) as Marshal Mark Dillon. The other starred Howard Culver (who had played *Straight Arrow*). The network passed on the idea, but kept the name handy-- just in case.

Then, in early 1952, a strange sort of providence happened. The CBS series *Operation Underground* was about to lose its sponsor-- and subsequently, its time slot. The network needed a replacement quickly. They had the *Gunsmoke* title and a willing producer in Macdonnell. All the producer



needed was a script, a star and some orchestrations.

He had a week to come up with all three.

Macdonnell and Meston (who had agreed to supervise the writing on *Gunsmoke*) got to work. First of all, something about the character's name-- Mark Dillon-- didn't seem right. Too contemporary, Meston thought; from now on, he would be Marshal *Matt* Dillon. Offering Meston's scripts for "Wild Jack Rhett" and "Pagosa" as examples, the duo gave radio writer Walter Brown Newman the task of writing the first episode. Freelance orchestrator Rex Koury composed a beautiful, majestic theme song under a tight deadline and scored it for an 18-piece orchestra.

Everyone concerned was determined that Matt Dillon would not be a stereotypical drawing cowboy. CBS, hoping for a star draw, suggested Raymond Burr for the role. Macdonnell and Meston, on the other hand, figured they could do just as well by

GUNSMOKE

drawing from the rep company they had built up doing *Escape* and *Romance*, especially since they had already produced a prototype of *Gunsmoke* with "Pagosa." So it was that William Conrad-- who had turned up on radio more often than static-- was cast as the Marshal. Conrad had a marvelous, resonant voice, and you knew he meant every word he said when he laid down the law. As he put it, Dillon was "the first man [would-be troublemakers] look for and the last they want to meet," and you believed it. (Macdonnell *did* use Burr a few years later, on the short-lived series *Fort Laramie*.)

Those people who listened to the first *Gunsmoke* on April 26, 1952, might not have automatically assumed that this was the future of radio. For one thing, the story relied heavily on coincidence. In it, a young man who idolizes the Marshal's way with a gun turns out to be young William Bonney (a.k.a. Billy The Kid). Dillon's relationship with his deputy Chester (played by Parley Baer) and the town Doctor (Howard McNear) were not completely defined; in this initial episode, Doc is thrilled to have the business that results from Dodge City's gunplay-- so thrilled that Dillon threatens to deck him. One character who would become a staple of the show didn't appear at all.

All of that would change, through the work of Meston and the kibitzing of the cast. An off-handed ad-lib by Baer gave Chester the last name of Proudfoot. Conrad, meanwhile, suggested naming the macabre Doc after *New Yorker* cartoonist Charles Addams, whose work also displayed a ghoulish humor.

Baer and McNear were consummate radio actors, and both brought great depth to their characters. As Dillon's deputy, Chester was loyal to the end, if not always



on-the-ball. He was susceptible to the lure of gambling, he drank his rye whiskey with sugar, he sometimes taxed Dillon's patience to the point where the Marshal would send him out for the mail just to get him out of the office for awhile. But he knew how to handle a gun and he understood that Dillon was in charge.

Doc, meanwhile, could be something of a rogue. John Meston described him as "somebody who didn't know too much medicine... but he was not a cynic." Indeed, he was livid when he encountered a bogus "medicine man" (as he did in the 1953 story "Professor Lute Bone"). At the same time, he wouldn't necessarily think twice about rooking a greenhorn in a card game, he couldn't always save his patients, and there were even times when he'd become a thorn in Matt's side just for something to do. In the 1956 story "Romeo," Matt has his hands full when the children of two rival cattlemen fall in love. Doc's contribution is to make matters worse by goading the two young lovers into running away and getting married. At the same time, he had a knack for knowing when

people were in trouble; beaten wives and past-their-prime gunslingers alike shared their secrets with Doc.

A few episodes in the run, Georgia Ellis joined the cast full-time as Kitty Russell.

Radio had rarely, if ever, seen the likes of Miss Kitty before. Ostensibly, she was a saloon girl who worked her way to become owner of the Long Branch Saloon. Meston, however, was cognizant of the realities of women trying to make a living in the old West. It was never stated outright on the show, but it was implied that Kitty made most of her money by engaging in the world's oldest profession.

Dillon and Kitty never really had what we would call a "romantic relationship," but there were no two people closer in all of Dodge. She was a woman trying to survive in an era where women generally depended on men; he was the lone voice of the law in an otherwise untamed territory. (As Dillon put it at the start of each episode: "It's a chancy job, and it makes a man watchful... and a little lonely.")

Matt and Kitty never actually professed love for one another, but they had a real bond. Ellis' voice had a wonderful, world-weary quality that was perfect for a character that implicitly had a past best left behind.

Their relationship is defined fairly early on in the show's run, in the 1952 episode "Kitty" (written by Georgia Ellis' then-husband Antony Ellis). Dillon invites

Kitty to a dance. She declines; although she doesn't say as much, she knows from experience what "upstanding citizens" think of saloon girls.

Finally, Kitty agrees to go, and the townspeople turn out to be just as antisocial as Kitty predicted. (Although they tell the Marshal that *he's* welcome to stay.) After being told her quite plainly that her presence isn't desired, Kitty is practically in tears and Dillon, furious with the "hypocritical prayer spouters," removes his badge and invites the insulting parties to back up their remarks. In the end, the two return to town, where they, Chester and Doc have a party of their own.

Such bittersweet stories were rare for radio drama, let alone Western radio drama, but they featured prominently on *Gunsmoke*. Under Meston's editorial supervision, Matt Dillon not only didn't wear a white hat, there were some occasions when he didn't even get the bad guys.

Meston's 1954 story "The F.U." took this "fallible hero" idea to its extreme. The story begins with a shooting, and Al Clovis is suspected. When he rides out of town, Matt



GUNSMOKE

and Chester assume he's guilty and dutifully follow him. Too late they realize that Clovis was a decoy, designed to lure the law out of town so that his gang could rob the bank. Things go from bad to worse later when the gang gets the drop on Chester, forcing Dillon to surrender his gun and his horses in exchange for his deputy. As the two lawmen start their long walk back to Dodge-- their quarry well out of reach-- a thunderstorm begins.

To say that this wouldn't happen to the Lone Ranger is putting it mildly. Meston and his staff of writers did a marvelous job of subverting Western clichés (Meston once wrote that his disdain for the typical screen cowboy was such that "I spit in his milk, and he'll have to go elsewhere to find somebody to pour the lead for his golden bullets"). Actor John Dehner recalled that the cast wasn't above bringing in their own reference material if they thought Meston was fudging details.

As a result of such devotion, the writers showed their audience that the settlers on the new frontier knew that defeat, sorrow and brutality went hand in hand with justice, humor and hope.

The desire to stake out new territory on *Gunsmoke* wasn't limited to the writers. The sound effects team of Tom Hanley, Bill James and Ray Kemper heightened the sense of realism with some revolutionary technical achievements.

Macdonnell realized that the deliberate pacing of Western drama-- coupled with the fact that the characters were often in unchartered territory-- meant that sound and sound-effects were as important as dialogue. Hanley, James and Kemper rose to the task with an uncanny attention to detail. When Matt left his desk for a cup of coffee, the soundmen made sure he took the same number of steps each way.

The *Gunsmoke* team even managed to make gunshots sound realistic. Prior to this, most sound effects men had simply shot blank cartridges near a microphone. This was passable (if a little generic) but because of the engineering at CBS, they were never as loud over the air as real gunshots.

Kemper and Hanley side-stepped the problem with the help of a brand-new technology: recording tape. The duo visited William Conrad's house (Kemper described it to Leonard Maltin as being "almost a natural amphitheater") and recorded a number of different gunshots. Then, when it came time for the broadcast, they used the tape machine to bypass the speaker and the engineering "limiters." The result was nothing short of revelatory; as Norm Macdonnell enthused later, gunshots finally sounded like gunshots.

Such devotion was the rule, rather than the exception, when it came to *Gunsmoke*. The players (both the leads and their support), the director, the crew, the musicians all enjoyed a healthy camaraderie and from all reports, enjoyed each other's company immensely.

With an almost unrivaled combination of professionalism and camaraderie (even for radio), it's no wonder that *Gunsmoke* became an almost immediate hit, at one point airing twice a week over CBS. Within a year, the show was sponsored by, of all things, Post Cereals (perhaps the Post people thought they were getting another *Tennessee Jed*); when they stepped aside, Chesterfield and L & M Cigarettes were waiting in the wings; they stayed with the show until 1957.

Given its success, it wasn't long before CBS contemplated taking *Gunsmoke* to television. The immediate question of casting reared its head: many radio shows that moved to television (e.g. *Burns & Allen*, *Our Miss Brooks*) did so with their original cast. In fact, the radio cast of *Gunsmoke*



GUNSMOKE TV Cast: James Arness (Matt), Ken Curtis (Chester), Milburn Stone (Doc), Amanda Blake (Kitty)

young Sam Peckinpah, who took *Gunsmoke's* realism a step further a decade later when he made *The Wild Bunch*.)

After *Gunsmoke* took off, a number of radio westerns-- good ones-- came and went. There was Macdonnell's 1956 series *Fort Laramie*, James Stewart's 1953 series *The Six Shooter*, *Luke Slaughter of Tombstone*, even a radio version of *Have Gun Will Travel* (starring *Gunsmoke* veteran John

Dehner). was allowed to "audition" for the television show (donning period costumes for a photo shoot at Knott's Berry Farm), but there is debate as to whether this was a serious audition or simply an attempt to placate the actors. (Certainly anyone who imagined Conrad as anything other than a portly fellow with a marvelous voice would have been in for a surprise.) Whatever the reason, when *Gunsmoke* debuted on television in 1955, James Arness, Amanda Blake, Dennis Weaver and Milburn Stone were Matt, Kitty, Chester and Doc.

Then as now, the debate rages among *Gunsmoke* fans as to which version was superior. Macdonnell always saw them as two separate entities-- even though the television show relied heavily on the radio show's scripts-- and that's probably the best way to look at it. (Actor Harry Bartell, who appeared on both versions of *Gunsmoke*, dismissed the television show as "the Hollywood version of the adult western.")

If *Gunsmoke* wasn't as innovative on television as it was on radio, it still managed to survive for a remarkable twenty seasons-- a feat that precious few shows in any medium accomplished. (It also featured a number of scripts written by a

Dehner).

When the wagons were gone and the smoke cleared, *Gunsmoke* was the only one left standing. In fact, it was the last of the west coast network dramas (*Suspense* and *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar* having moved to New York) when it was cancelled on June 18, 1961. Apparently, no one in the cast had any idea at the time of the show's demise; had they known, Parley Baer suggested, "it would have been terribly depressing."

Its tempting to say that *Gunsmoke* is gone but not forgotten, but that's something of a cliché, and *Gunsmoke* hated clichés. Instead, let's say that *Gunsmoke* was that rarest of breeds; a show that managed to both innovate and entertain, a show that was as much fun to make as it was to hear, a show whose best moments carry as much dramatic weight now as they did forty years ago.

It was a special show in a special time. We will not see the likes of it riding through town again anytime soon. ■

NOTE-- Tune in TWTD September 25 to hear the two Gunsmoke audition shows and a 1952 broadcast from the series.

The Final Role of Linda Darnell

BY WAYNE KLATT

Linda Darnell was one of the few Hollywood stars to die a hero, although her sacrifice in a Chicago suburb is little remembered now.

The actress was born Manetta Eloisa Darnell in Dallas, Texas on December 16, 1921, and she was in a church theater group by the time she was 13. As a teenager, Linda dreamed of being a glamorous movie star and living in what she considered “ease and luxury.” Her black hair, wide eyes, and pale skin—a combination giving her a slightly exotic look—made her a natural for films. A talent scout reported that her height, weight, and coloration were “ideal” and that she was “quick and intelligent.” At the time, she was only fifteen and already getting offers as a fashion model.

Her first film was *Hotel for Women* in 1939, when she was 18. Darnell married the cameraman who gave her the screen test, Peverell Marley. But her beauty, her quick learning, and her serious way of delivering lines meant that she soon had little time to be herself. “I didn’t discover the true meaning of work until I got here,” she said of her success in Hollywood.

Darnell was quickly assigned to the “A” List of films at 20th Century Fox, starring with Tyrone Power in *Mark of Zorro* (1940) and *Blood and Sand* (1941).

The actress’s intelligence came through in her performances, setting her apart from the other pretty faces in Hollywood. Rather than the usual fluff contract actresses were sometimes forced into, Darnell seemed just right for roles in adaptations of best-sell-

Wayne Klatt is Night Editor at New City News Service, Chicago and a free-lance writer.



ing books, including *Song of Bernadette* (1943), in which she appears as a vision of the Virgin Mary; *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946); *Forever Amber* (1947); and *Walls of Jericho* (1948).

With the post-war movie trends turning away from meaningful roles for women, Fox moved her into the background in such films as the John Ford western *My Darling Clementine* (1946), but she made an impression in the Academy Award winning *A Letter to Three Wives* (1948).

But Hollywood was using actresses like wallpaper rather than giving them roles of substance. Ignored by the public, Darnell spent her free time playing tennis, riding horses, and sketching. Not knowing what to do with someone of her seriousness, the

studio put her in two comedies involving classical music, as the wife of conductor Rex Harrison in *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948) and the wife of unlikely opera singer Paul Douglas in *Everybody Does It* (1949).

By then Darnell regarded acting as just work and did not seem to notice what film she was in. Her decade of fame failed to bring her any joy in life, and she went through three divorces. At 40 she looked older, and her acting was stiff and with a sad undercurrent. Could anyone blame her, when her latest (and final) film was *Black Spurs* with Rory Calhoun?

Her greatest satisfaction was raising a girl she had adopted as a baby, Charlotte, usually called Lola. Darnell took a few roles in television dramas and frequently appeared on Chicago-area stages, including a starring role in *Love Out of Town* at the Pheasant Run Playhouse in St. Charles. Without any publicity, she quietly did charitable acts such as flying a 15-year old Will County boy to California at her own expense when she learned that he was suffering from a terminal kidney ailment.

Darnell was back in the Chicago area to visit her friend and former secretary, Jeanne Curtis of 675 Carriage Hill South in suburban Glenview. As the mother of a teenager herself, Darnell enjoyed talking to Curtis's 16-year old daughter, Patricia. On Friday, April 19, 1965, Darnell stayed up late in their home to watch one of her early films, *Star Dust* (1940). She turned off the television set and went upstairs to bed at 2:30 a.m.

At 5 a.m. Saturday, a fire broke out in a downstairs sofa, possibly from a cigarette. Patricia suffered minor burns and jumped from a second story window, injuring her ankle. Mrs. Curtis was rescued by firefighters and became hysterical because she didn't know where her daughter and Linda Darnell were.

The actress had awakened to smoke and



rushed downstairs possibly thinking Patricia might be trapped by the blaze. Apparently searching for the teenager, Darnell's lungs filled with smoke and were seared by flames. She lost consciousness and collapsed behind the charred sofa.

Flames had burned 80 per cent of her body by the time firefighters could reach her. She was rushed unconscious to Skokie Valley Hospital and then to the burns center of Cook County Hospital. Doctors performed two operations to remove dead tissue from her body. The story was carried on newscasts nationwide.

Darnell's 17-year-old daughter flew to her bedside and was able to read to her telegrams of concern from friends early Saturday afternoon. Darnell looked up at Lola and weakly uttered her last words, "Who says I'm going to die?"

One of the most recognizable and intelligent actresses in the final years of Hollywood's heyday then died at the age of 43. ■

Chicago Radio Giants

BY JOHN MIES

In the 1940s, '50s and '60s, Chicago radio yielded a rich harvest of unique, colorful broadcasters. I was fortunate enough to have worked for and with many of them.



My entrance into that Golden Age was in 1948. While going to school under the G.I. Bill, I was lucky enough to land a part-time job as proof reader/script typist in the

WGN Continuity Department.

At approximately 9 a.m. every weekday morning Tribune Tower went on alert anticipating the arrival of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, Editor and Publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* and owner of WGN! The Colonel was not only the owner of that pioneer station, but was also a leading personality on its most popular program. His interest in radio began in the 1920s when he told his mother, "you cannot help being thrilled at that little box that picks sounds from the air." Thus, in the 1940s he launched, with a Ziegfeld-like flair, *The Chicago Theatre of the Air*. It was broadcast before an audience in the city's largest, most lavish studio built a few years before at a cost of \$600,000. Chicagoans and tourists lined up for blocks along Michigan Boulevard waiting to get in.

Chicago Theatre of the Air presented popular operettas and operas in English and indeed for both the studio and listening audience those Saturday night broadcasts were like going to the Civic Opera House.

John Mies of Van Nuys, California is a retired radio writer who worked in Chicago broadcasting for many years.



Col. Robert R. McCormick

Such soloists as Marion Claire, James Melton, Jan Peerce, Thomas L. Thomas, and Richard Tucker dazzled the audience. Chicago's best actors and actresses read the dramatic lines. All were attired in evening gowns and white tie and tails, as were the engineers, musicians and other studio personnel.

At intermission, the distinguished Colonel made his appearance before the microphone to deliver his weekly commentary on military strategy and tactics. His knowledge of the subject rivaled the leading historians of the day, but it was a strange interlude indeed for a program dedicated to the works of Sigmund Romberg and Victor Herbert.

There were other strange aspects to the Colonel's presentation. For example, his commentary scripts could only be typed on a manual typewriter. The station's new

IBM Electrics were taboo. There had to be six spaces between each line and no erasures were permitted. Thus, if the typist made an error the entire page was redone. Mistakes were costly in more ways than one since only the highest grade, most expensive bond paper was used.

One Saturday afternoon a crisis arose. The Colonel's script had somehow been lost. A panic call came into the Continuity Department. Since I had the only manual typewriter, I was given the awesome task of retyping his script from a Ditto machine copy. Using the "hunt and peck" system to eliminate errors it was finished a few nervous hours later.

To the director in the control booth the Colonel's segment of the program was like walking through a mine field. An advance timing was given to the script, but the Colonel was no man to play second fiddle to a stopwatch. After all, his editorial motto was: UNDOMINATED. He delivered his treatise at a pace of his own choosing and frequently ad-libbed... sometimes digressing to discuss thoughts that had just occurred to him. Everyone stood by for emergency cuts so that the show got off on time. Even a Richard Tucker might have to shorten an aria! With a flair for the dramatic the Colonel sometimes would leave the audience in suspense as he announced, "We'll find out who won this battle next week!"

McCormick also disdained housekeeping chores. As he finished each page of his script... he let it flutter to the floor where it was retrieved by a *Tribune* corporate vice president no less, who stood beside the podium. The VP handed the Colonel the



neatly restored script as he majestically strode from the microphone!

The Colonel was not the only McCormick in Chicagoland radio who arrived for his program dressed to the nines. Johnny McCormick (no relation) was known as WBBM's Man About Town. Late night strollers along Boul Mich were treated to the sight of John emerging from his chauffeured limo in front of the Wrigley Building in his top hat, white tie and tails. He wore that splendid attire sitting before the mike during his all night music show.

Showmanship was a staple of the WBBM Air Theatre, personified by its chief executive H. Leslie Atlass. Atlass had sold WBBM to CBS in exchange for several million dollars and a *lifetime* contract as corporate vice president and general manager of WBBM. For decades he was the most powerful and innovative broadcaster in Chicago. Chicago was long known as an Irish city and the WBBM air staff abounded with Irish surnames. Some

CHICAGO RADIO GIANTS

real, such as Fahey Flynn and John Harrington, but many fancied. Jim Conway, Jim McShane, Maury Magill and Josh Brady were Irish by the stroke of the Atlass pen.

Showmanship notwithstanding, Atlass was also a tough and demanding boss. He gave little or no margin for error. For example, he spotted a staff producer coming out of a control room dressed in a rumpled tweed sport jacket, well-worn corduroy slacks and ankle-high rough leather Army shoes badly in need of repair. This hardly met with the conservative Atlass dress code. The producer was terminated that afternoon!

Even the venerable Art Mercier, who WBBM listeners thought went with the call letters, once fell victim to the Atlass wrath. Art held the position of chief announcer at the time and one Saturday was at lunch in the B&G Coffee Shop a few doors from the Wrigley Building when disaster struck up in the studio. A mike had been left open during a local cut-in on a network college football broadcast and some profane remarks aired from coast-to-coast! The break studio engineer and announcer were fired and so was Mercier... who was in the B&G! Atlass took the position that Art was the announcer in charge and therefore responsible. A couple of weeks later, he relented and hired Mercier back.

Singing star Don Cherry was removed from the payroll in a way that would have made Machiavelli proud. Cherry was earning a thousand dollars a week doing some radio, but mostly appearing on WBBM-TV. With the price of live variety shows sky rocketing, Atlass deemed it was time to cut costs. Cherry had a contract, of course, and was offered a buyout. Don refused the offer declaring he would stay through the run of his contract. As always, Atlass had



the last word. Cherry's new and *only* assignment was to sing the "Star Spangled Banner" *live* at sign off... approximately 1 a.m. ...and sign on at 5 a.m. for WBBM-TV! A very short time later Don accepted the buyout. Not too long after that he dropped his singing career altogether to become a pro golfer on the PGA tour.

Frequently Atlass threw a lavish all-day party cruise on his yacht *Sis* (named after his daughter), but even this elongated Happy Hour could be fraught with peril. During World War II a widely displayed poster warned "A Slip of the Lip Can Sink a Ship" and aboard the *Sis* a slip of the lip could sink a career. A WBBM wag aptly called the yacht's mooring berth "The Pink Slip."

John Harrington and Paul Gibson were the brightest stars in the WBBM galaxy. They had a large and loyal audience and brought huge profits to the station. The then Assistant General Manager, Ernie Shomo, had the uneasy task of riding herd on these very talented and sometimes explosive personalities. Harrington was called *Big Jawn* (at six foot four inches tall, 270 pounds), or *The Rajah* (he was paid \$3,500 per week). Most of us knew his bark was worse than his bite, but you couldn't convince Ernie Shomo of that. Harrington's news and sportscasts dotted the daily schedule. The first at 6:55 a.m., the last at 10 p.m., the premier local news time slot. He also hosted a half-hour music show on Saturday morning, did the



play-by-play for the Midwest College Football Game of the Week, and did a 15 minute nightly TV sportscast. Only Lindbergh logged more airtime than *Big Jawn!* During the holiday season he threw catered parties for the studio crews and held elegant annual Christmas parties for his writers and producers at his sprawling West Suburban home.

Like John Harrington, Paul Gibson was a giant in Chicago broadcasting for many years. Paul had a rich, if acerbic, delivery and a powerful, if waspish, intellect. On his daily early morning broadcast he discoursed on a wide range of subjects, mostly aimed at the pitfalls of every day coping. I suppose it was the forerunner of today's Talk Radio, but on Paul's show he was the only one who talked. Gibson was a true eccentric. He rarely allowed himself to be photographed, believing it added a mystic attraction. And it did. Listeners could create the face to go with the voice. Paul was also an avowed misogamist yet he was married and divorced five times. Perhaps

it was alimony that turned him against that popular institution since he complained on the air about his excessive payments at least once a broadcast.

Being an iconoclast and proud of it, Paul carried out a running battle with station management. A general memo banned coffee pots from offices. Paul ignored it and when his was confiscated by Security, went on the air to demand its return or the Security Chief would be arrested and charged with a felony. The coffee pot was back that afternoon.

The coffee pot incident was merely a prelude to Gibson's ultimate act of defiance.

Early morning drive time had become radio's biggest audience source and Paul was ordered to give the time every few minutes. He refused on the grounds he was a serious commentator, not a disc jockey. The station countered with a threat to sue for breach of contract. The next morning Paul told his listeners that he'd been asked to give the time frequently, but his watch had stopped and the studio clock was broken. However, he said, Mr. Shomo, now the station's General Manager, has a very accurate watch, so just call him. With that, Gibson proceeded to give Shomo's *unlisted home phone number!* Shomo drove to the station in record time and confronted Gibson like an avenging angel out to destroy the wicked! WBBM reverberated with aftershocks for days.

Gone are these colorful giants of yesteryear. Those magnificent men and their radio machines have become part of broadcast lore.

We shall never meet their likes again. ■

NOTE-- Tune in TWTD September 4 to hear a broadcast of the Chicago Theatre of the Air and the Paul Gibson program where he tells his listeners to phone the station manager.

ON THE ROAD WITH BING, BOB AND DOROTHY

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

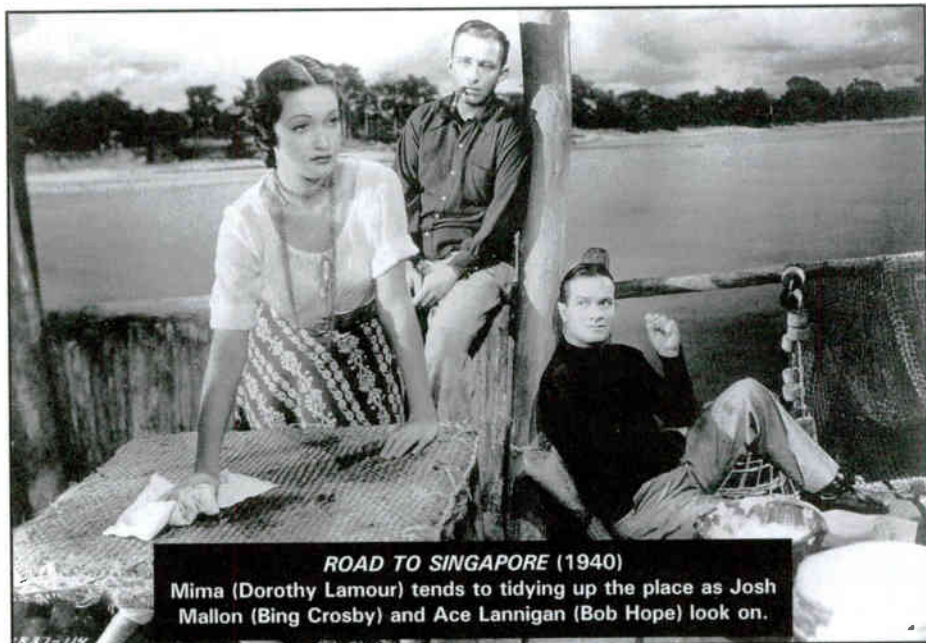
The pairing of two complementary talents in the movies has been going on since film making began, from Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy to Mel Gibson and Danny Glover. But no teaming has been so beneficial and endearing as the joining of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in the seven *Road* pictures they made with Dorothy Lamour.

But it almost never happened. In 1939, Paramount Pictures had an old script which had been written for George Burns and Gracie Allen. For whatever reason, they were unavailable to make the film and the script was rewritten for Jack Oakie and

Fred MacMurray. That did not work out either so the script was handed to Crosby, Hope and Lamour.

Although *Road to Singapore* would be their first movie together, Hope and Crosby had met each other about seven years before the teaming and had even performed some vaudeville routines together at the Capitol Theater in New York. Working in a film together was a natural extension of those performances.

All the *Road* films followed the same basic format: a flimsy plot with adventurers Hope and Crosby caught in seemingly impossible situations. They would defeat





ROAD TO ZANZIBAR (1941)
 Donna Latour takes comfort in the arm of
 Chuck Reardon as Fearless Frazier looks on.

the bad guys -- usually utilizing the famous patty-cake routine -- and vied with one another for Lamour's attention. A few ballads, duets and comedy numbers were added for musical flavor. It all seemed to work.

In *Road To Singapore*, (1940) Crosby and Hope swear off women and escape to a South Seas island where they encounter Lamour, as well as the "heavy," Anthony Quinn. Songs in the first *Road* picture included "Too Romantic," "Sweet Potato Piper" and "The Moon and the Willow Tree."

It was in *Singapore* that the easy-going and quick-witted banter between the two leads was established, a facet that contributed greatly to the series' success.

The system came about almost by accident, as a result of Hope and Crosby appearing on each other's radio shows where their writers had developed a semi-insulting conflict between the two performers. It carried over into their movie making and enabled the *Road* pictures to

have an air of excitement usually found only with live entertainment.

As sequel crazy as the film studios might be today, they were no different in the 1940s. As soon as Paramount realized *Road to Singapore* was a hit, they started lining up the next *Road* picture.

In *Road to Zanzibar*. (1941) Crosby and Hope are American sideshow artists in the jungles of Africa. Two stranded girls (Dorothy Lamour, Una Merkel) persuade the boys to take them on a long safari in search of a diamond mine. Songs included "It's Always You," "You're Dangerous," "You Lucky People, You," and "Road to Zanzibar."

After *Zanzibar* came *Road to Morocco* (1942). *Morocco* was the first *Road* picture to use references that were outside the plot and the first *Road* picture to utilize supernatural action.

When Hope starts explaining the plot, Crosby says, "I know that."

"Yeah, but the people who came in the middle of the picture don't," said Hope.

ON THE ROAD

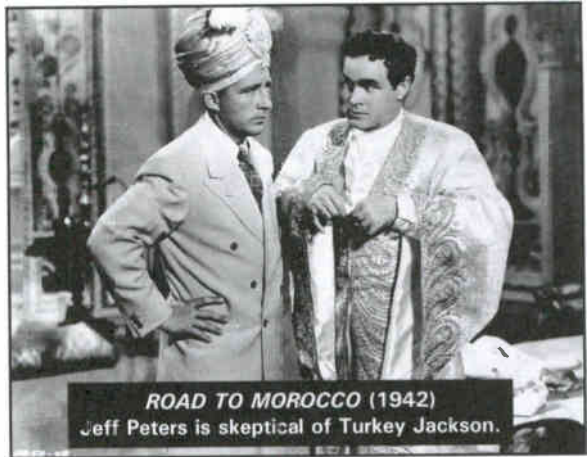
"You mean they missed my song!" said Crosby.

At another point in the picture, Hope's curve-toed Arab shoes become uncurled when Lamour kisses him.

"Now kiss him on the nose," Crosby suggests. "See if you can straighten that out."

In this, their third *Road* picture, Crosby and Hope land in Morocco after a shipwreck where Crosby sells Hope into slavery. He joins him later when Hope becomes head man at the desert paradise of Lamour and they run into trouble with the sheik (Anthony Quinn). Songs in the film included "Moonlight Becomes You," "Constantly" and "Road to Morocco."

By this time, the free-wheeling nature of the pair was catchy. In *Morocco*, they were working with a camel and as Hope walked up to the camel's head, the camel turned and spat in his face.



ROAD TO MOROCCO (1942)
Jeff Peters is skeptical of Turkey Jackson.

"Print that," said David Butler, the director. "We'll leave it in." It was so spontaneous that it was left in the final cut of the film.

With three *Road* pictures under their belts, the team found the public still wanted more. The country was in the midst of World War II and people clamored for any opportunity to take their minds off their troubles. The success of the *Road* pictures was due, in part, to that need for



ROAD TO UTOPIA (1945)
Chester Hooton, Sal and Duke Johnson are halted by murderers (played by Robert Barrat and Nestor Paiva).



ROAD TO RIO (1947)
 "Hot Lips" Barton and "Scat" Sweeney
 perform the song "Apalachicola, Fla."

escapism via movies depicting a simpler, more adventurous way of life.

That adventurous nature appeared again in *Road to Utopia* (1945) where Crosby and Hope are a couple of vaudevillians-con men who travel to Alaska in search of gold and come across a stolen map that belongs to Lamour. This was the only *Road* picture that was presented as a flashback, with Robert Benchley doing dry commentary. Songs included "Personality," "Would You" and "Anybody's Dream."

The "outside the context of the plot" elements continued in *Utopia*. At one point in the film, Hope and Crosby are stoking coal in a ship's boiler room when a man in a top hat and tails walks past.

"Are you in this picture?" asks Crosby.

"No," replies the man. "I'm just taking a short cut to Stage 10."

By now the two had established their characters and refined their wisecracking. It came together best in *Road to*

Rio (1947).

In *Rio*, Crosby and Hope are a pair of Hollywood musicians who play a one-night stand at a carnival, burn the place down, then stow away on a liner for Rio de Janeiro. They encounter Lamour, whose sinister aunt (Gale Sondergaard) is marrying her off to a shady character. Crosby and Hope discover the aunt is using hypnotism to control Lamour and later use it to their advantage. Songs included "But Beautiful," "You Don't Have To Know The Language," "Apalachicola, Fla." and "Experience."

Road to Rio was the best of the seven *Road* pictures. It captured the easy-going nature and rapport of the two performers more than any other film.

In addition, the film made good use of the guest stars, the Andrews Sisters (singers) and the comedic Wiere Brothers, two very popular acts at the time the movie was made.

Rio was followed successfully by *Road to Bali* in which vaudevillians Hope and Crosby are in Australia but are forced to leave because of a pair of matrimony-minded girls. Their voyage takes them to a South Sea island where they meet a princess (Lamour) who is searching for sunken treasure. Songs included "Chicago Style," "Hoot Man" and "The Merry-



ROAD TO BALI (1952)
 George Cochran and Harold Gridley each try to
 convince Lalah that he is the right man for her.

ON THE ROAD

Go-Runaround.”

Bali also was one of the best films Hope and Crosby made together. The inside jokes that kidded each other and the movie-making industry were ingenious and plentiful.

For example: Crosby starts to sing a love song to Lamour and Hope deadpans to the camera “He’s going to sing, folks. Now’s the time to go out and get popcorn.”

Bing Crosby’s brother, Bob, a band leader in his own right, came into a scene in *Bali* and shot a rifle in the air. When Lamour asks Crosby who the guy was, Crosby answers, “That was my brother. I promised him a shot in the picture.”

Bali was the only *Road* picture made in color and it added the exotic element that was hard to capture on black and white film.

By the time Hope and Crosby were ready to hit *The Road to Hong Kong* (1962), much of the charm had faded from the series. Still a humorous film in some ways, *Hong Kong* lacked the vigor and sharpness of the previous films and, therefore, pales by comparison.

In *Hong Kong*, Hope and Crosby are on the run and blunder into a vaudeville act which stars Dorothy Lamour (appearing as herself). Hope loses his memory and the two adventurers become involved with a spy, Joan Collins (later of *Dynasty* fame), plus a group of thugs led by Robert Morley. Peter Sellers has a funny cameo and Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, David Niven, Zsa Zsa Gabor and Jerry Colonna make brief appearances. Songs included “Teamwork.”

The Road to Hong Kong was probably the weakest of the seven *Road* films, relying heavily on special effects and guest stars. In addition, Hope and Crosby looked a tad old to be the frolicking



ROAD TO HONG KONG (1962)
Dorothy (appearing as herself)
with Bob (playing Chester Babcock).

voyagers that they were in the earlier films, especially opposite a young Joan Collins.

Hope and Crosby spent the most of their time travelling on *Roads* without ever reaching their destinations. But getting there was not only half the fun, it was the basis of every picture.

Through it all, the two, together with Dorothy Lamour, performed some memorable songs, did self-deprecating and semi-insulting humor and effected numerous running gags. It all made the audience feel as if they were in on what was happening, something that was unique at that stage of motion-picture making.

The asides to the camera, the spontaneous ad libbing--all were a part of the charm of the *Road* pictures. Hope and Crosby knew they were not doing *Gone With The Wind* or Shakespeare. They were there simply to entertain - and that they did. ■

Randall G. Mielke is the author of a book about the seven "Road" films, Road to Box Office, available at Metro Golden Memories in Chicago, where you will also find all seven of the "Road" pictures for sale or rent. Call 1-800-538-6675. Mr. Mielke's book may also be ordered from the publisher, McFarland and Co., 1-800-253-2187.

Tales of the Yesteryear

The Ice Cream Parlor

BY RUSS RENNAKER

In those days it was said if you stood on this street corner for an hour any Saturday evening you would see everyone you knew in the course of that hour.

It was the Ice Cream Parlor and Candy Kitchen. It was situated on a corner of the town square. In the summer time the front door was always open and traffic flowed relentlessly in and out of the cool interior. It was the only store at that time which had an overhead electric fan.

Along one side of the interior was the candy bar. A display of every kind of candy you could imagine, behind glassed-in compartments. From the rear of the room, through closed doors, wafted the delicious smells of candy in the making. It was made right there behind those closed doors.

In front of the candy counter, occupying the rest of the room were little round tables with ornamental wrought iron legs and chairs made from the same ornamental wrought iron legs and backs, with little round seats. There were usually four chairs to each table.

The whole affair was ruled over by an affable, always smiling, Greek wearing a white apron tied around his waist. I think

Russ Rennaker of Kokomo, Indiana was born in 1906 and is a retired broadcast engineer who worked at WBBM, Chicago and WJSV, Washington, D.C.

he must have known everyone in the County by their first name. Especially the children.

The ice cream concoctions were legend. There was the usual Sundaes, chocolate, strawberry, and fudge. There were exotic dishes, one called the Tin Roof, and another called the Buffalo.

Then there was the Strawberry delight, the Merry Widow, the motif for this one was maraschino Cherries and, of course, the inevitable Banana Split. Prices ranged from a simple dish of vanilla ice cream at five cents to the Banana Split at a quarter.

There were ice cream cones, too, a single dip for five cents, a double dip for a dime and the magnificent triple dipper for fifteen cents.

It was the summer evening haven for everyone. The tables were almost always filled. You waited for a vacant seat standing in front of the candy counter trying not to look at the various mounds of sweets.

My parents usually gave my sister and I each a dime for our favorite flavor. I remember one summer we were being visited by our more affluent cousins from Chicago. My mother, not wishing to humiliate her children, gave us each fifteen cents so we could enjoy a Sundae, expectantly with them.

You guessed it.

Our affluent cousins ordered the twenty-five cent Banana Split! ■



SATURDAY, AUGUST 14th WORLD WAR II in IV HOURS

CBS NEWS SPECIAL (12-8-41) *Excerpt.* President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivers his "Day of Infamy" speech before a joint session of Congress, asking for a declaration of war against Japan. CBS. (13 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-18-42) Jack and the gang— Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Don Wilson— in a wartime broadcast from Williams Field in Arizona. Jack decides to do his part for the war effort and donates his Maxwell to the Scrap Drive. Grape Nuts, NBC. (30 min)

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (12-1-42) Jim and Marian Jordan star with Isabel Randolph, Gale Gordon, Bill Thompson, Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Wartime mileage rationing has come to Wistful Vista. This is the last program for Gale Gordon before he entered the U.S. Coast Guard. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (1-24-43) Harold Peary stars with Walter Tetley, Lillian Randolph, Lurene Tuttle, Earle Ross, Shirley Mitchell, Dick LeGrand. Air Raid Warden Gildersleeve is concerned about sabotage at the Summerfield Arms Manufacturing Plant. Judge Hooker is in charge of Civilian Defense. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (6-6-44) The President of the United States addresses the nation on the evening of the D-Day invasion and asks the country to join him in a prayer. His remarks are followed by Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians presenting "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Battle Hymn of the Republic." All Networks. (15 min)

PRESIDENT HARRY S TRUMAN (5-8-45) The President announces the unconditional surrender of Germany and the end of the war in Europe. "This is a solemn but glorious hour... I only wish that Franklin D. Roosevelt had lived to witness this day." All Networks. (6 min)

HOWARD K. SMITH (5-9-45) War Correspondent Smith reports (via shortwave) on the bombed city of Berlin as it appeared following the Nazi surrender. "It's the most massive work of concentrated destruction in history." Combined Networks. (10 min)

GABRIEL HEATTER (8-13-45) The commentator talks about the expected surrender of Japan and the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration and what it means to Japan and the Emperor. "Even civil war in Japan isn't ruled

out as a possibility now. Their people know nothing even now regarding their surrender offer." Kream! Hair Tonic, MBS. (14 min)

CHICAGO VICTORY CELEBRATION (8-14-45) Don Elders describes the scene from atop the marquee of the Roosevelt Theatre in Chicago's Loop. "State and Madison is a bedlam of victory celebrations." NBC. (4 min)

FOURTEEN AUGUST (8-14-45) A message for the day of victory, written, produced and edited by Norman Corwin and spoken by Orson Welles. Corwin greets victory over Japan with a look at the awful effects of the weapon used. Sustaining, CBS. (16 min)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 21st SALUTE TO ARTHUR ANDERSON

LET'S PRETEND (6-21-47) "Bluebeard" featuring Gwen Davies, Jack Grimes, Bob Reddick, Ann Marie Guyer, Arthur Anderson, Sybil Trent, Miriam Wolfe. "Uncle" Bill Adams is host. Cream of Wheat, CBS. (24 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (10-24-98) Actor Arthur Anderson recalls his radio career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Friends of Old Time Radio Convention in Newark, New Jersey. (29 min)

MERCURY THEATRE ON THE AIR (7-18-38) "Treasure Island" starring Orson Welles in the adventure story by Robert Louis Stevenson. Cast includes Arthur Anderson, George Colouris, Ray Collins, Alfred Shirley, Agnes Moorehead. Welles appears as Long John Silver and as Jim Hawkins who tells the story. Arthur Anderson appears as Jim Hawkins as a boy. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min & 34 min)

LET'S PRETEND (1950s) "Radio's outstanding children's theatre" presents "Hansel and Gretel" featuring Arthur Anderson, Gwen Davies, Sybil Trent, and "Uncle" Bill Adams. Sustaining, CBS. (28 min)



—plus—

RECOLLECTIONS AT THIRTY (1-2-57) Ed Herlihy hosts program 22 in the 33-part series commemorating NBC's 30th anniversary: Ethel Merman; Judy Holliday; Bea Wain with Larry Clinton's orchestra; Martha Raye with Cary Grant; Grace Moore; Judy Canova; Ginny Sims with Kay Kyser's orchestra. Sustaining, NBC. (26 min)



Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

AUGUST -- SEPTEMBER 1999

SATURDAY, AUGUST 28th MORE BIG BANDS ON RADIO DURING THE 20th CENTURY

JUBILEE #98 (9-25-44) Program for military audiences hosted by Ernie "Bubbles" Whitman and featuring Count Basie and his orchestra, actress Butterfly McQueen, vocalists Thelma Carpenter and Jimmy (Mr. Five By Five) Rushing, drummer Buddy Rich, and bandleader Artie Shaw. AFRS. (30 min)

NBC BANDSTAND (11-8-56) *Excerpt* from the two-hour daily program hosted by Bert Parks and featuring Guy Lombardo and the Royal Canadians with the Trio, Kenny Gardner and guest vocalist Dick Haymes. NBC. (21 min)

FITCH SUMMER BANDWAGON (6-4-39) Broadcast from Chicago with "talent scout" Garry Morfit (later known as Garry Moore) presenting the popular new bands of tomorrow. Featured in this show are Jack Teagarden and the orchestra with vocalist Linda Keene. Fitch Shampoo, NBC. (30 min)

GLENN MILLER AND HIS ORCHESTRA (8-15-

39) Remote broadcast from the Glen Island Casino "overlooking the waters of Long Island Sound" in New Rochells, New York. Vocals by Marion Hutton, Ray Eberle and Tex Beneke. Sustaining, NBC. (15 min)

HENRY BUSSE AND HIS ORCHESTRA (1935) Syndicated studio broadcast featuring Henry Busse "and his Monmarte Orchestra" with vocals by Marion Holmes, Steve Bowers and Carl Grayson. Syndicated. (15 min)

VICTORY PARADE OF SPOTLIGHT BANDS (1-10-45) Lawrence Welk and his Champagne Music playing for the war workers of Continental Motors Corporation in Muskegon, Michigan. Vocals by Jane Walton and Bobby Beers. Coca Cola, BLUE NETWORK. (24 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is Big Band Historian and frequent *Nostalgia Digest* contributor Karl Pearson who will talk about the important part that the big bands played on radio in the 20th Century.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4th

RECOLLECTIONS (1-9-57) Ed Herlihy presents program number 23 in this series commemorating NBC's 30th anniversary: Gene Autry; Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou; Lillian Roth; Rudy Vallee's "Announcer's Contest"; Magic Key of RCA. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

GRAND CENTRAL STATION (9-18-48) "Too Young to Understand" starring Will Geer in a story about a down-on-its-luck family and their faith in each other and in God. Announcer is Ken Roberts. Pillsbury, CBS. (30 min)

BOSTON BLACKIE (7-23-45) "Case of the Three Way Split" stars Richard Kollmar as Blackie who is the prime suspect in a murder case. R&H Beer, WOR/MBS. (30 min)

PAUL GIBSON (3-20-56) Chicago radio's opinionated ad-libber in an early-morning show. Gibson's boss, station manager Ernie Shomo, wants him to give frequent time and weather reports (just like Howard Miller, on another station). Gibson complains about this new

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policy and tells listeners to call Shomo at his home in Glenview! Many sponsors, WBBM, Chicago. (27 min)

CHICAGO THEATRE OF THE AIR (1-15-49) Hostess and producer Marian Clair introduces Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinafore." Singing cast includes Adele Norman, John Stanford, Ruth Slater, Bruce Foote, John Barkley. Dramatic cast includes Muriel Bremner, Everette Clark, Sidney Ellstrom, Norman Gottschalk, Hope Summers. Music conducted by Robert Trendler, announcer is Lee Bennett. Between acts, *Chicago Tribune* publisher Col. Robert R. McCormick talks about Benjamin Franklin. Sustaining, WGN/MBS. (27 min & 10 min & 22 min)

For more on the Chicago Theatre of the Air and Paul Gibson, read the article on page 10.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th SALUTE TO KEN ROBERTS

THE SHADOW (10-23-38) "Gun Island" starring Bill Johnstone as Lamont Cranston with Agnes Moorehead as the lovely Margo Lane. Cranston and Margo find themselves aboard a ship that has been taken over by pirates! Ken Roberts announces. Blue Coal, MBS. (30 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (10-24-98) Actor Ken Roberts talks about his long broadcast career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the friends of Old Time Radio Convention in Newark, New Jersey. Part 1 of a 2-part interview. (27 min)

LINIT BATH CLUB REVUE (1-22-33) Fred Allen stars with Portland Hoffa, Lou Katzman and the orchestra, and announcer Ken Roberts. Judge Allen wants to start a chain of cut-rate courts around the country as a parade of defendants pass through his courtroom. Linit Products, CBS. (25 min)

CRIME DOCTOR (4-8-45) House Jamison stars as Dr. Benjamin Ordway, a criminal psychologist. A couple try to collect a reward for saving a young heiress. Announcer is Ken Roberts. Philip Morris Cigarettes, CBS. (23 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (10-24-98) Part 2 of the conversation with actor Ken Roberts. (23 min)

YOU ARE THERE (2-27-49) "The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson." It's May 16, 1868 in

Washington, D. C. as CBS News reporters John Daly, Quincy Howe, Ken Roberts, Don Hollenbeck and Ned Calmer cover the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, accused of high crimes and misdemeanors. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18th

NATIONAL BARN DANCE (4-1-39) Joe Kelly emcees a broadcast from the "old hayloft" at Chicago's Eighth Street Theatre featuring Uncle Ezra, Hoosier Hot Shots, Skip Farrell, Maple City Four, and Henry Burke. Alka Seltzer, WLS/NBC. (30 min) *Read the article about the history of WLS on page 26.*

RECOLLECTIONS (1-30-57) Program 24: Irene Dunne; Joan Davis and Ben Blue; Wrong Way Corrigan; Vaughn de Leath; Ipana Troubadours; Tony Wons Scrapbook; Russ Columbo. Sustaining, NBC. (24 min)

MY FRIEND IRMA (4-27-54) Marie Wilson stars as Irma with Mary Shipp as Kay, with Alan Reed as Mr. Clyde, Irma's boss. Irma plans to save Mr. Clyde's marriage when she finds out Mrs. Clyde wants a divorce. Bobbi Home Permanent; Arrid with chlorophyll, CBS. Actress Toni Gilman appears in the Arrid commercial. (28 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (10-24-98) Actress Toni Gilman talks about her long career on radio, television and the stage in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Friends of Old Time Radio Convention in Newark, New Jersey. (28 min)

TEXACO TOWN (11-29-36) Eddie Cantor stars as his honor, the "mayor" of Texaco Town. Picking up from a gag on last week's broadcast, Cantor has "found" his program. Regulars include Harry "Parkyakarkus" Einstein, Bobby Breen, Deanna Durbin, Jacques Renard and the orchestra, announcer Jimmy Wallington and Toni Gilman in a brief, unbilled appearance as Wallington's wife Betty Jane. Texaco, CBS. (28 min)

INNER SANCTUM (1-30-50) "Skeleton Bay" with Charlotte Holland and Martin Gabel. A woman takes a vacation to Skeleton Bay and witnesses a murder. Problems arise when she helps the murderer get rid of the body. Raymond Edward Johnson is host. Bromo Seltzer, CBS. (29 min)



Ken Roberts



Toni Gilman



Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

SEPTEMBER 1999

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25th

DUFFY'S TAVERN (1950s) Ed Gardner stars as Archie the manager whose old Grammar School teacher, checking up on her former pupils, visits him in the Tavern. "She was the dame that learned me everything that I know," says Archie. Syndicated. (28 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (4-10-79) Actor Michael Rye (who was known as Rye Billsbury earlier in his career) talks about his broadcasting days in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at Paramount Pictures studios in Hollywood, California. (16 min)



Michael Rye

GUNSMOKE (6-11-49) *First audition show.* "Mark Dillon Goes to Gouge Eye" starring Rye Billsbury as United States Marshal Mark Dillon who travels from Dodge City to the town of Gouge Eye to check out a

crooked gambling casino. CBS. (31 min)
RECOLLECTIONS (2-6-57) Program 25: American Album of Familiar Music; Ethel Barrymore; Your Hit Parade; Bing Crosby; Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians; Duncan Sisters. Sustaining, NBC. (24 min)

GUNSMOKE (7-13-49) *Second audition program.* "Mark Dillon Goes to Gouge Eye" starring Howard Culver as United States Marshal Mark Dillon. Same story as in the 6-11-49 audition show, but with a different cast which includes June Foray, Gerald Mohr, Vic Perrin, Jack Krushen, B. J. Thompson, Jay Novello. CBS. (31 min)

GUNSMOKE (8-30-52) "The Juniper Tree" starring William Conrad as United States Marshal Matt Dillon, with Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot. A horse rancher is accused of trying to steal money from a gambler. Cast includes Vivi Janis, Paul DuBov, Bill Lally, John Dehner, Michael Ann Barrett. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min) *Read about Gunsmoke on page 1.*

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ART HELLYER SHOW-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, now in his 52nd year on the air! *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 11am-2 pm.*

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

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

SATURDAY SWING SHIFT-- Bruce Oscar is host for this two-hour show featuring swing music on record performed by the big bands, pop singers and small groups. *WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 10 am-Noon.*

IMAGINATION THEATRE-- This series is broadcast weekly in many cities across the country. For the station in your area, call Tim McDonald at TransMedia Productions at 1-800-229-7234. For a list of stations carrying the program and an episode guide, the Internet address is: tmedia@aimnet.com

METRO GOLDEN MEMORIES-- John Sebert and Bob Greenberg host a program of old time radio broadcasts. *WNDZ, 750 AM, Friday, 3-4 pm; repeated Saturday morning, 6-7 am.*

"When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

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

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
August, 1999 Schedule				
2 Mr District Attorney Abbott & Costello Pt 1	3 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Frontier Gentleman	4 Sam Spade Life with Luigi Pt 1	5 Life with Luigi Pt 2 Murder By Experts	6 The Shadow Superman
9 Bold Venture Phil Harris-Alice Faye 1	10 Phil Harris-Alice Faye 2 The Whistler	11 Green Hornet Burns & Allen Pt 1	12 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Dimension X	13 Suspense Superman
16 Johnny Dollar Fibber McGee & Molly 1	17 Fibber McGee & Molly 2 Dagnet	18 Lone Ranger Fred Allen Pt 1	19 Fred Allen Pt 2 Boston Blackie	20 The Shadow Superman
23 Gunsmoke Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	24 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Box Thirteen	25 Damon Runyon Theatre Jack Benny Pt 1	26 Jack Benny Pt 2 Have Gun, Will Travel	27 Suspense Superman
30 Escape My Favorite Husband 1	31 My Favorite Husband 2 Tales of Texas Rangers	OUT OF AREA LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE If WMAQ Chicago is out of your reception area, "When Radio Was" is heard on a great many other stations throughout the country. For a complete station listing, plus more detailed program information, and a steady audio stream on the Internet, visit www.radiospirits.com		
September, 1999 Schedule				
		1 Mystery in the Air Fred Allen Pt 1	2 Fred Allen Pt 2 Dr. Christian	3 Suspense Superman
6 The Saint Life of Riley Pt 1	7 Life of Riley Pt 2 Dimension X	8 Boston Blackie Martin & Lewis Pt 1	9 Martin & Lewis Pt 2 This is Your FBI	10 The Shadow Superman
13 Suspense Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	14 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Family Theatre	15 This is Your FBI Aldrich Family Pt 1	16 Aldrich Family Pt 2 Philip Marlowe	17 Suspense Superman
20 Escape Duffy's Tavern Pt 1	21 Duffy's Tavern Pt 2 Richard Diamond	22 Hermit's Cave Our Miss Brooks Pt 1	23 Our Miss Brooks Pt 2 Screen Directors' Pyhse	24 The Shadow Superman
27 Broadway is My Beat Archie Andrews Pt 1	28 Archie Andrews Pt 2 Damon Runyon Theatre	29 Sam Spade Fibber McGee & Molly 1	30 Fibber McGee & Molly 2 Screen Directors' Pyhse	

Vintage

75th Anniversary of Chicago's 'Shirt-Sleeve' Radio Station

BY WAYNE W. DANIEL

In the spring of 1924 commercial radio broadcasting in the United States was not quite four years old. The first scheduled, non-experimental, public program had been aired on November 2, 1920, from the primitive "studio" of 100-watt KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During the intervening three and a half years the American people had become greatly enamored of this new medium of entertainment, information, and what many perceived as near magic. Some 570 broadcasting stations were on the air, and more than three million families had added a receiving set to their household furnishings. The United States Department of Commerce was speculating that the number of radio listeners was in the neighborhood of twenty million.

Amidst this fervent enthusiasm for the novelty of the wireless transmission of sound, a new station ventured onto the scene in Chicago, then the nation's second largest city. The date was April 12, 1924,

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

and the station's call letters were WLS. It announced itself to the listening audience on a wave length of 345 meters (a frequency of 870 kilocycles) with a power of 500 watts. (In 1941 WLS changed to a broadcasting frequency of 890 kilocycles.) This new kid on the ethereal block joined the ranks of KYW, WDAP, WGN, WMAQ, and WTAY, stations that had already made their Windy City debuts.

On Monday, April 14, *Chicago Daily Tribune* columnist Elmer Douglas apprised readers of WLS's emergence. "Station WLS, which the stork delivered ... Saturday evening, began its career with an unusually rich, mellow voice and of power," he wrote. "May it live long and prosper!"

WLS was the brain child of Sears, Roebuck and Company whose mail-order catalogs had been arriving regularly in rural mailboxes since 1893. The Chicago-based emporium conceived of WLS, which would cater to the interests of farmers, as a way to strengthen the loyalty of its most faithful customers. By devoting significant air time to weather reports, market information, and other issues of concern to the farmer and his family, WLS (the call letters stood for "World's Largest Store") would enhance the mail-order firm's commitment, through its Agricultural Foundation, to help the farmer "farm better, sell better, and live better." Early on, station executives made sure that the entertainment



WLS Family Albums were published annually between 1930 and 1957. The cover of the first one shows a family gathered around the radio, a scene, no doubt, inspired by Burrige D. Butler's emphasis on the virtues of family life.

it provided would also appeal to rural listeners. Announcers were instructed to present their messages in such a way that they would be perceived as though accompanied by "a handshake and a smile." Because of its pervasive informality, WLS was soon known as Chicago's "shirt-sleeve" station.

Early WLS schedules, though sparse as was common in those first years of broadcasting, were indicative of the program content that would be followed for the next thirty plus years. As reported in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the offerings for Tuesday, April 15, 1924, for example, were as follows:

12 - 1 pm Agricultural talks for farmers, vocal numbers.

3:45 - 4:45 pm Homemakers' hour.

6:30 - 8:00 "Crops," Frank I. Mann. Address by Mayor Dever.

8:00 - 9:00 Sportsman's hour.

9:00 - 10.00 Glenn Dillard Gunn, pianist; solos; orchestra.

10:00 - 12:00 Midnight Mardi Gras. Talent from Lew Fields' show.

Tribune columnist Douglas, though apparently not a farmer, found the new station's airings to his liking. "The day started with the noonday farm program at WLS," he wrote. "It was so enjoyable that I'm going to try to hear their program this afternoon, and I hope you do likewise. Another treat equally good may be in store for us."

A brief note on the *Tribune's* radio page for Saturday, April 19, anticipated further what lay in store for WLS listeners: "8 to 12 — WLS — Old Time Fiddlers program; Hotel Sherman Orchestra; features." As it turned out, these frugally chosen words announced the first broadcast of what would become WLS's most famous program, the *National Barn Dance*.

Despite its lofty ambitions, Sears, Roebuck and Company, did not long remain in the broadcasting business. From the beginning, some of the company's executives had opposed the involvement in radio. They had rightly surmised that the operation of a radio station was no inexpensive matter. As early as 1930 the cost of keeping the station on the air was reported to be a thousand dollars a day. Since most any potential sponsor would be a Sears Roebuck competitor, WLS had not sold advertising. Consequently no explicit profit from the radio venture could be demonstrated, although WLS management insisted that radio exposure was responsible for hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales of Sears, Roebuck merchandise.

Those opposed to the broadcasting experiment prevailed, and in September, 1928, WLS was sold for \$225,000 to the Chicago-based *Prairie Farmer*, a popular and highly-respected agricultural newspa-

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per with roots extending back to 1841. Other interested buyers had been rejected in favor of *Prairie Farmer* whose management convinced the seller that they would continue the operation of WLS in a manner compatible with the philosophy and practices that Sears, Roebuck had established. In announcing the purchase of WLS to his million and a quarter readers publisher Burrige D. Butler wrote, "I have added the radio to the working tools of *Prairie Farmer* because it will enable us to do better work for the farmer and his interests and to widen the field of *Prairie Farmer's* influence."

In characteristic Burrige D. Butler style, the new owner of WLS articulated what he termed the WLS Creed.

A copy of the creed as placed in the cornerstone of the new WLS transmitter built in 1938 on Route 45 and 183rd Street. Inscribed on a bronze plaque, the creed graced the entrance just inside the *Prairie Farmer* building.

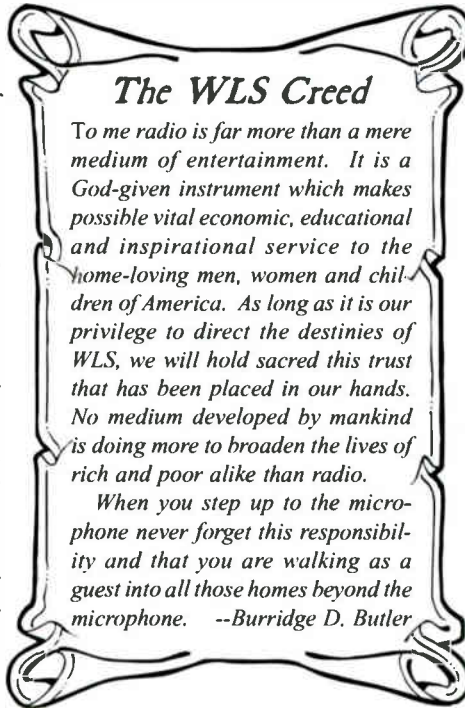
The creed was taken seriously by WLS and *Prairie Farmer* employees. In the October 6, 1928, issue of *Prairie Farmer*, associate editor Dave Thompson, who had been put in charge of the newspaper's radio section after the transmission of ownership, wrote, "so long as it is my high privilege to have anything to do with the planning and performance of the programs,

every moment of the program must answer this question, 'Will this promote the business interests or emotional happiness of the millions of farm families of the United States?'"

Upon the sale of WLS its studios were moved from the top of Sears' west-side store to the top floor of the *Prairie Farmer* building at 1230 West Washington Boulevard where, as readers and listeners were constantly reminded, "the latchstring [was] always out." Had they not been told of the shift in ownership, listeners might never have suspected the change. Programming continued in its by then familiar vein, there was little change in on-air personnel, and Edgar L. Bill, who had been hired three years earlier by Sears, Roebuck continued as station director.

But as WLS matured, changes did occur as management took advantage of technological advances and exhibited considerable innovative and creative skills in the areas of programming and community service. "The Voice of Agriculture," as WLS came to be known, was destined to exert considerable influence in the world of broadcasting during the '30's, '40's, and '50's, a period later referred to as the Golden Age of Radio.

One of the first changes of which listeners became aware after *Prairie Farmer* assumed ownership of WLS was the airing of commercials. Over the years, the station's programs would be sponsored by



The WLS Creed

To me radio is far more than a mere medium of entertainment. It is a God-given instrument which makes possible vital economic, educational and inspirational service to the home-loving men, women and children of America. As long as it is our privilege to direct the destinies of WLS, we will hold sacred this trust that has been placed in our hands. No medium developed by mankind is doing more to broaden the lives of rich and poor alike than radio.

When you step up to the microphone never forget this responsibility and that you are walking as a guest into all those homes beyond the microphone. --Burrige D. Butler

such firms and products as Aladdin lamps, Hamlin Wizard Oil, Oshkosh B'Gosh overalls, Purina Mills, Republic Steel, Chevrolet, Willard Tablets, Keystone Fence, Gillette tires, Allis-Chalmers, and Alka-Seltzer, the fizzing antacid analgesic that made its radio advertising debut on WLS on January 10, 1932, as sponsor of a program called "Songs of Home Sweet Home." Shortly after the program aired, Chicago druggists began selling four times as much Alka-Seltzer as their counterparts in markets without radio exposure. As a result of its policy of selling radio air time, WLS was reputedly "pulling in a solid profit" soon after becoming *Prairie Farmer* property.

Within a year of its purchase by *Prairie Farmer*, WLS programming had expanded to a schedule that started at six o'clock in the morning and ended at various times in the evening, depending on the day. Programming stopped in the evening at 11 on Mondays and Saturdays; 8, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 10, Thursdays; 10:30, Fridays; and at 7 am on Sundays. In due time the broadcast day would start earlier and end later. The content of the programs continued to be a mix of news and information of practical use to the farmer and his family, special event broadcasts, and entertainment. Station management learned early on that the best times to reach the farmer were early in the morning, during the noon hour, and on Saturday nights.

For years WLS signed on — some years as early as 5 a. m. — with a program called *Smile-A-While*. Listeners heard weather reports that included temperatures and weather conditions for Chicago and 15 neighboring states; market reports, time signals, and world news. Another feature of the program was the Farm Bulletin Board consisting of farm stories, and information on farm activities and events. Interspersed among these announcements



WLS artists frequently graced the covers of popular sheet music. This one features a photograph of Louise Massey and the West-erners. The song, published in 1933, was written by two other WLS artists, Al Rice, a member of the Maple City Four group, and Fleming Allan, the station's music director at the time.

were songs, music, and comedy by such artists as the Hoosier Sod Busters, the Four Hired Hands, and Otto and the Novelodeons. Broadcasting from the *Prairie Farmer*-WLS Little Theater studio, the *Smile-A-While* program was open to visitors, and they came in droves to watch the show and partake of the coffee and doughnuts prepared especially for them and the cast. On August 28, 1937, 600 visitors signed the Little Theater guest book. During the previous year visitors had come from 45 states to watch the broadcast.

In the middle of the day, when farmers were expected to be at the house for their noon meal, WLS broadcast the *Prairie Farmer Dinner Bell Program*. This show was similar to *Smile-A-While* with the addition of guest speakers and a devotional segment, presented for many years by Rev.

VINTAGE WLS

John W. Holland. The program frequently broadcast from remote locations such as state fairs and other special agricultural events. In 1954 WLS celebrated the 8,000th broadcast of *Dinner Bell*, touting it as one of the oldest farm radio programs in the world. *Prairie Farmer* reported that "During its many years of continuous operation it has brought its listeners practically all the great farm leaders of our generation, and given at least 10,000 farm people a chance to speak over its microphones." Several hundred more WLS broadcasts of *Dinner Bell* lay ahead.

The crown jewel of WLS programming was the Saturday night *National Barn Dance*. "We had so much highbrow music the first week that we thought it would be a good idea to get on some of the old time music," station director Edgar L. Bill said. "The truth was that we doubted the advisability of putting on old time fiddling. Tommy Dandurand with his old-time fiddlers and one or two other acts appeared on that first night. After we had been going about an hour, we received about 25 telegrams of enthusiastic approval. It was this response that pushed the *Barn Dance*."

In addition to fiddler Tommy Dandurand, other early *Barn Dance* performers included the vocalist present at the very first WLS broadcast, Grace Wilson, known as "The Girl With a Million Friends" who made "Bringing Home the Bacon" a *Barn Dance* favorite; Chubby Parker, singer of songs like "Stern Old Bachelor" and "Nickety Nackety Now," accompanied by his old-time banjo picking; Pie Plant Pete (Claud Moye), a harmonica and guitar player whose song "It Can't Be Done ("You can't take a goose and make gooseberry pie," for example)" was a favorite; and ballad singing Bradley Kincaid who helped make "Barbara Allen"

one of America's best known folk songs.

Over the years hundreds of the nation's best country/western and old-time talent put in time at WLS. Entertainers whose names became household words throughout the Midwest and in other parts of the country included the Maple City Four; the Girls of the Golden West (Millie and Dolly Good); the Prairie Ramblers; the Hoosier Hot Shots; Lulu Belle and Scotty (Wiseman); Arkie, the Arkansas Wood-chopper (Luther Ossenbrink); Louise Massey and the Westerners; Uncle Ezra (Pat Barrett); Bob Atcher; the DeZurik Sisters; Karl and Harty; Mac and Bob; Henry Burr; and Homer and Jethro. Many Barn Dance alumni, notably Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette, Eddie Dean, Red Foley, Pat Buttram, George Goebel, and Rex Allen went on to become recording, motion picture, and television stars. Gene Autry, Red Foley, and long-time vocalist with the Prairie Ramblers, Patsy Montana, have been inducted into Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame.

The *Barn Dance* was broadcast originally from WLS studios except on hot summer nights when — during those pre-air conditioning days — the cast retreated to the roof of the *Prairie Farmer* building to put on the show. With the arrival each year of the autumn state fair season the *Barn Dance* troupe regularly journeyed to these events in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin to present their Saturday night broadcasts which drew audiences of up to 10,000. Because of limited seating capacity in the studio, WLS, on March 19, 1932, began broadcasting from the stage of Chicago's Eighth Street Theater, located at the corner of Eighth and Wabash. *Prairie Farmer* later reported:

Although there was much doubt as to the success of the venture at the start, the Barn Dance has filled the theater for two performances each Saturday night for two straight years.



It is an air show first and a theater presentation only incidentally. Commercials and station announcements are broadcast from the stage just as they would be from the studios. There's nothing that goes on in the theater which the radio audience can not appreciate. A total of 223,704 persons have paid admissions.

The audiences have been composed of persons from the 48 states, eight Canadian provinces, Mexico and several other foreign countries. As far as is known, a man from Semarang, Java, was the person farthest from home when he attended the program.

Except for one year, the *Barn Dance* was staged at the Eighth Street Theater until 1957. That year was 1943, when the United States Army required the use of the theater as part of its World War II operations. To accommodate Uncle Sam, WLS moved the *Barn Dance* to the Chicago Civic Center. Throughout the life of the show people came from all over the world to see the *National Barn Dance*. Between 1932 and 1957 more than two-and-a-half million paid admissions were tallied..

The September 30, 1933, issue of *Prairie Farmer* announced that "Because of immense popularity built up during the past nine and a half years, the *Prairie Farmer-WLS National Barn Dance* starts on a national NBC network tonight over 18 stations from New York to Omaha. So now millions of added listeners will enjoy the antics of Old Uncle Ezra, and the old-time music and singing of our Cumberland Ridge Runners, Three Little Maids, Mac and Bob, George Goebel, and other favorites. Hal O'Halloran [emcee] will be talking to more folks than he ever imagined possible when he entered radio."

By September 1935 the number of stations carrying the *National Barn Dance*, which was sponsored by A&K-Seltzer, had grown to 38, extending from the West Coast to Boston and as far south as New Orleans. On October 14, 1944, the Paramount motion picture, "The National Barn Dance," starring members of the *Barn Dance* cast, premiered at the Eighth Street

VINTAGE WLS

Theater as part of the regular *Barn Dance* show.

Other WLS programs that were popular with listeners included the *Homemakers' Hour*, a mid-afternoon show featuring information and guest speakers on a wide variety of topics of interest to women; a Saturday morning children's program whose title changed depending on the host — *Jolly Joe (Kelly) and His Junior Stars*, and *Uncle Mal* (Malcolm Claire), for example; and the *Little Brown Church of the Air*, a long-running Sunday program featuring devotions by Rev. John W. Holland and sacred music by various WLS artists.

But WLS was not totally about broadcasting and turning a profit. Station management, under both Sears, Roebuck and *Prairie Farmer* ownership, was committed deeply to community service. The WLS Relief Fund was organized in 1925 following a devastating tornado that hit southern Illinois. During the following week the station was on the air almost constantly raising money for the American Red Cross for use in rehabilitating damaged farms and homes. A total of \$216,904.80 was raised, along with carloads of clothes, bedding, and other necessities. Over the years the Relief Fund raised money to help victims of other natural disasters.

In 1935 WLS organized a Neighbor's Club to which listeners could send donations to be used for charitable causes at Christmas. By 1952 a third of a million dollars had been contributed. The money was used to purchase radios, children's wheel chairs, inhalators, orthopedic walkers, and other items which were distributed to hospitals, orphanages, and child care facilities.

During World War II, WLS performers and other employees conducted bond drives, operated a station-sponsored vic-



Standby, a fan magazine, was published weekly by WLS between February 16, 1935, and June 25, 1938. Each issue featured a photo of a station personality. On this cover is Little George Goebel, boy soprano, who became a WLS artist in 1932 at the age of thirteen. He became famous years later as a television comic.

tory garden at Burrige D. Butler's Burr Ridge farm, entertained servicemen with free concerts, and collected tons of scrap metal.

Other community service activities sponsored by WLS included the operation of a community kitchen during the Depression, rural fire prevention education and promotion, home talent shows, and regular broadcasts for more than sixteen years of educational programs for classroom use by Midwest public school teachers.

While engaged in these public service activities and the day-to-day operation of the station management at WLS never lost sight of the need to attract and hold listeners. Among the strategies employed by the station to build and retain its audience base were publications, contests, and stunts. The first publication used for WLS promotion was *Prairie Farmer* which began car-

rying the station's programming log, along with photographs, comment, and news about performers and behind-the-scenes employees.

In 1930 the first of twenty-eight annual publications titled *WLS Family Album* was offered for sale by mail to the station's listeners. Printed on slick paper, each issue contained photographs — and sometimes brief biographical sketches — of WLS on- and off-air personalities, editorial comment by Burrige D. Butler, and other items of information about goings on at the station. According to the editor, the purpose of these publications was to “enable you [the listeners] to become better acquainted with the *Prairie Farmer* station folks who come to you through your loudspeaker.” The last family album appeared in 1957.

Another WLS publication was made available to listeners in February of 1935 for a subscription fee of one dollar a year. Titled *Standby* (a phrase used by program producers to alert the cast to be ready to go on the air within a few seconds) this weekly news magazine featured photographs, biographical sketches, and current news about WLS personalities. It also carried letters from readers, advertising, WLS program logs, cartoons, and the performers' personal appearance itineraries. Before publication of its 176th and last issue on June 25, 1938, *Standby* circulation reached 91,000.

Other WLS publications included almanacs, a cookbook, song books, a booklet containing performers' autographs, and a book of limericks about station personalities.

Contests sponsored by WLS didn't always carry a prize other than on-air recognition. One such “contest” was conducted to learn where people listened to radios other than in their homes. In those days before the general availability of portable receiving sets, variation in radio location



depended on listener diligence and ingenuity in the stringing of wires and placement of loudspeakers. Barns were favorite places for secondary listening posts, so that farmers could go about their daily routines without having to miss their favorite programs. One enterprising farmer rigged up a loudspeaker in his cherry tree to scare away hungry birds.

One of the most popular contests conducted by WLS — and one that did carry a prize — was held in 1939. Listeners were asked to send in suggestions for a name for a stray cat that had taken up residence behind stage at the Eighth Street Theater. More than 8,000 responses poured in. The winning entry was “Kitty Kilocycles,” a name submitted by a listener in Rockford, Illinois. The prize was a pillow autographed by WLS artists and stuffed with feathers sent in by listeners from forty-one states.

Other contests with monetary prizes included a finish-the-limerick contest; a prize

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for the best letters answering the question, "What does radio mean in your home?"; and contests in which listeners were invited to write a letter of nomination for the best WLS program or to state in "50 words or less" why they liked a certain product advertised on the station. In 1931, a contestant sent in her entry attached to the leg of a homing pigeon. The bird was fed, watered, and returned to sender with a message informing her of the prize she had won.

When it came to programming stunts and gimmicks, vintage WLS was without equal. Announcers, engineers, and entertainers traversed the Midwest to stage on site broadcasts of every kind of event from horseshoe pitching contests to corn-husking competitions. On a Saturday night in 1934 Grace Wilson sang her *Barn Dance* number from an airplane high over Lake Michigan. She was accompanied by pianist John Brown who was on stage at the Eighth Street Theater. According to the 1935 *WLS Family Album*, "The song and the accompaniment matched together as perfectly as if Grace had been standing beside the piano." The broadcast of this airborne antic was heard on the coast-to-coast network portion of the *Barn Dance*.

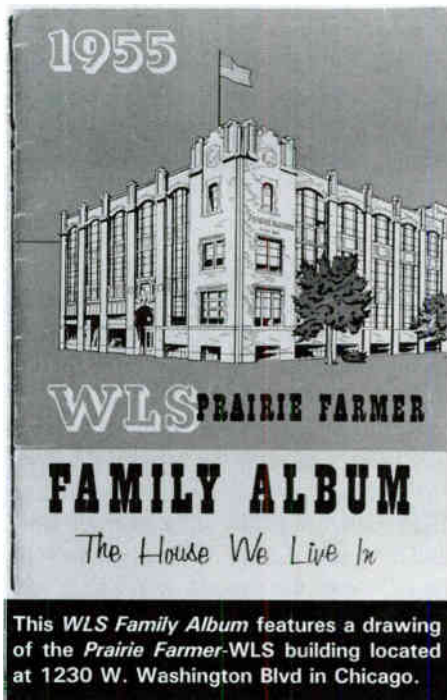
There was a broadcast from a submarine on its mission to cross Lake Michigan under water, and when one-time boy soprano George Goebel was inducted into the Army in 1942, the swearing-in ceremony took place on stage during a *Barn Dance* broadcast.

WLS's promotional efforts resulted in a folksy, down-home bonding between performer and audience. "We often refer to our listeners and ourselves as the 'Prairie Farmer-WLS family circle,'" said the 1933 *WLS Family Album*. "So when you hear us speak of the 'family circle,' think of Mr.

Butler, who sits at the head of the table." Listeners responded warmly and often to such fatherly comments. In 1936 WLS received 1,515,901 pieces of mail. By 1949 a total of more than 20 million cards and letters had been received, and a staff of twelve persons was required to handle the large volume of mail. Letters came from listeners who wanted minute details regarding the personal lives and physical characteristics of the performers — birthdays, marital status, and numbers, ages, and genders of their children; listeners who named their babies, pets, and farm animals after their favorite performers; and listeners like an Illinois woman who, in the 1930's, kept a record of every performer, and the selection performed, on 250 *Barn Dance* programs over a period of five years.

More than announcers and entertainers was required for WLS to uphold its reputation as the country's premiere "Voice of Agriculture." Studios, technical equipment, and a large contingent of behind-the-scenes personnel were needed to meet the needs of a station dedicated to serving a maximum number of rural listeners.

In October, 1929, WLS broadcast ground-breaking ceremonies for a three-story addition, including new facilities for WLS, to its West Washington Boulevard building. According to a report in *Prairie Farmer*, "[The new WLS facilities] will represent the last word in radio studios, with an auditorium, a concert studio, rehearsal studios, an organ loft and a theater for the accommodation of visitors." That same month word reached the station from Washington, D. C., that WLS had been granted a permit by the federal radio commission to erect a 50,000 watt transmitter. "This will give us 10 times the power we are now using, thereby making it possible for our signals to be received with perfect clarity 3 1/2 times as far as at present," a station spokesman stated. WLS was the



third Chicago station to be granted the maximum power allowed by the U. S. government.

The astute listener was expected to notice an improvement in sound quality of broadcasts from the new studios which were completed in 1930. That was because the studios were lined with a material made (appropriately) from cornstalk fiber that caused sounds to reverberate about a second longer resulting in a “brighter” sound.

For much of its existence as a *Prairie Farmer* station WLS broadcasts originated from several remote studios in addition to the main studio complex at 1230 West Washington Boulevard. These studios were at the Sears Tower, United Press headquarters, the Mercantile Exchange, the Chicago Stadium, the grain market, the Livestock Exchange, the stockyards, and the Sherman Hotel. Signals from all other remote studios went directly to the Sherman Hotel studio where they were

mixed, modulated, boosted, and sent to the transmitter located 35 miles south at Crete, Illinois. An additional remote site was added when the *National Barn Dance* moved to the Eighth Street Theater where broadcasts emanated from the stage and a balcony studio used during the intermission between the two Saturday night *Barn Dance* shows. By 1940 five engineers were needed for duty at the transmitter while seven worked in the studios.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for a new 50,000 watt transmitter approved by the Federal Communications Commission were broadcast on the *Dinnerbell Time* program April 12, 1938, the fourteenth anniversary of WLS. The new \$250,000 transmitter, dedicated on November 12, 1938, was located on Route 45 and 183rd Street. WLS purchased another new transmitter in 1959.

Burridge D. Butler died on March 30, 1948. Upon his death WLS was placed in the hands of six trustees, all of whom had been associated with him for many years. In 1960, the owners of WLS, feeling the effects of a declining farm population and the ascendancy of television as the major medium of home entertainment, sold both *Prairie Farmer* and WLS to American Broadcasting-Paramount Theaters, Inc. In deference to what the new owners perceived to be changing tastes in music, WLS, the “Voice of Agriculture” became the voice of rock-and-roll as live performances by such artists as Lulu Belle and Scotty, the Arkansas Woodchopper, and Bob Atcher gave way to disk jockeys spinning records by the likes of the Beatles, the Platters, and the Wailers. Thus, as *Prairie Farmer* stated in its January 1, 1991, issue, “one era of radio broadcasting ended and another began.” ■

NOTE-- Tune in TWTD September 18 to hear a broadcast of the WLS National Barn Dance.

PLAY BALL!

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Play ball!

Nowadays, baseball games last a lot longer on the radio than they did in the good old days.

First off, there is a half-hour program, during which the sportscasters fill you in on what happened yesterday, give you an idea what's on tap today, comment on the weather and condition of the field, and interview a few notables. In some cities, this happening can be stretched out to an hour, if needed.



Then there is the game itself. You never know how long that will run. Mostly, it depends on how many relief pitchers are used by the crafty managers in their battle of wits. A new relief pitcher usually kills about ten minutes just getting to the mound, and some of them are only in there to toss one pitch, after which another rescue hurler may waste ten minutes more before getting to work. Some games can take an eternity, if enough relievers are available.

Then there is the show after the game, during which the sportscasters tell you about what happened during the long running game you have just heard. They also tell you the scores of other games, fill you in on what's next on the old schedule, and grab an interview with the batboy, or some other individual who figured prominently in the game that day.

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

When all is said and done, the idea is to get as many commercials in as possible. Games are expensive to broadcast today, and those commercials foot the bill. The more the merrier. So be it.

During the early years of radio, baseball had trouble sticking its nose in the door. In those days, everything had to be on time. If a program was due on at a certain time, and the game was still in progress, fans sitting close to their radios were stuck with the regularly scheduled show, and often did not learn the final score until they read it in the next day's newspapers. Babe Ruth might have slugged a game winning homer, and it would be hours before his fans were aware of the facts.

In my town, there were two teams back in the thirties, and for most of the forties. Boston had both the Red Sox and the Braves, who headed for other parts before the second world war.

Following their games was an experience today's listeners might not want to endure. The games went on the air at three o'clock sharp, precisely when the very first pitch was headed for home. The only announcer on hand got tangled tongue trying to fill you in on who was pitching, who was playing where, and who was at bat, as well as the names of the umpires. The poor guy was exhausted by the time the first inning was over.

In Boston we had Fred Hoey and, later, Jim Britt who did these solo performances. The color guys came aboard later. They included Leo Egan, Bump Hadley and Tom Hussey. By the time Curt Gowdy hit town,

he had Ned Martin, any spare sports writers who were handy, and even comedian Danny Kaye to help him with the games.

But in the beginning we had Fred Hoey, and he wore out his tonsils telling you about the games. Only home games were aired. The Red Sox dominated for a week or ten days, then hit the road, and the Braves took over for a while. Fred Hoey handled both teams and did a pretty good job, all things considered.

The sponsors had a tough time getting a word in edgewise. They could only sell their products between innings. These sponsors sold products that appealed to men. It was felt women had little, if any, interest in listening to a ball game. Beer, cigars and cigarettes, haberdasheries were sold over the airwaves. Also cars, because, at the time, men were supposed to be the only ones who knew how to drive those magnificent machines.

Scores of games in other towns were given every three innings, if the teletype was working. There were only eight teams in each league, so there weren't too many scores available.

In Boston, the games were aired over WAAB, which later became WNAC. At exactly five-fifteen, *Superman* came on, followed by *Captain Midnight* and *Tom Mix*. During the winter, when there were no games, they were great listening. During the summertime, if you were tuned to the baseball game, you grew to hate *Superman*.

Ted Williams could have been at bat, Bob Feller pitching, and the pennant at stake. It didn't matter. At five-fifteen, *Superman* went on. That meant the game went off.

You were left waiting for the next pitch to be tossed.

Later on, at six-fifteen, on the same station, after the news, there was a sports show with Fred Hoey, or Jim Britt, and you finally were able to learn what happened. If you missed the sports show, you had to wait for the newspapers.

Then there were those "telegraphic recreations" of road games, when the local games were rained out. Say the Braves game was called off, and the Rex Sox were visiting the Yankees. Naturally, there was an audience for the New York contest, but, in those days, live games, on the road, in my town, were banned.

Jim Britt and Tom Hussey would sit in a studio with a Western Union chap who knew the Morse Code.

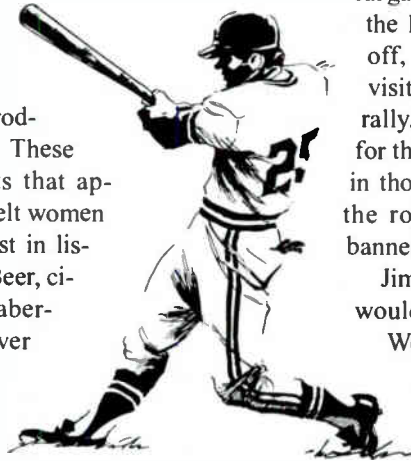
Pitch by pitch, the game would be teletyped into our area.

Britt and Hussey would try to make the game as lively as they could, and that was a task with that teletype clattering away in the background.

Also, a lot depended on the dramatic ability of the announcers. If your announcer was a frustrated actor, or had a sense of the dramatic, the telegraphic shows might not put you to sleep.

The clicker would sound once or twice, and then Britt would say: "Strike two. That one was low, and on the corner, folks. Jimmy Foxx eyed it carefully, then elected to take it. It was a close call, and Foxx gave the umpire a dirty look, but didn't say a word."

Hussey's approach was a bit simpler. The clicker would clicker, and Hussey would say: "Called strike two," and let it go at that.



PLAY BALL!

Whether the baseball games were live or telegraphic, they went off the air at five-fifteen, no matter what was happening. *Superman* prevailed.

Then somebody had a bright idea. It was decided, at five-fifteen, that the baseball game would be switched to WMEX, another Boston station. It was located in Kenmore Square, and only had power enough to send its message to the other side of the street.

Greater Boston followers of the sport twisted their dials all over the place until they heard WMEX whispering the games. That way, if they were lucky, they found out how the game ended.

WMEX was a classical music station, and at six o'clock some announcer with a nasal condition played recordings of the great music of yesteryear. He would talk about Mozart, or Brahms, or some other great composer for five minutes, and then fill you in on the symphony about to be played, after which he put the record on.

In the baseball game lasted beyond six o'clock, you had to listen to classical music, if you were able to pick up WMEX. You may not have heard the final score, but at least you were blessed with a slice of culture.

After the second world war, they started broadcasting road games live. This meant another station, WHDH, got into the act. Curt Gowdy was brought in to broadcast the Sox games on that station, and Jim Britt remained with the Braves on WNAC, which WAAB had become by then. Poor Britt! The Braves left town shortly after that, and he didn't have a team to talk about.

Baseball, as it is done on radio, has definitely changed. They even broadcast spring training games now.

It is all over the airwaves — that is, when the players are not on strike. ■



Our Readers Write

WE GET LETTERS

CHICAGO-- Towards the end of your interview with Richard Beals (*TWTD*, March 20, 1999) he said something that was classic. A great group of words... affirmations if you will. In my 71 years I've seen and read many affirmations that had appeal, to be sure. But nothing to date can compare with this from Mr. Beal. I could not copy it fast enough, so I am writing to you for those words. -- **JIMMIE K**
(ED. NOTE -- Richard Beals said, "Whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe and enthusiastically act upon, must inevitably come to pass.")

NORRIDGE, IL-- Years ago when I was a kid in grade school at John V. Leigh school, there was a program on radio we kids would listen to called "Uncle Dan." I believe he told stories about nature from his rocking chair on his cabin's porch. What can you tell me about it? Also, are there any recordings available from this program?

--**TOM JARNOWSKI**

(ED. NOTE-- We're not familiar with an "Uncle Dan" radio show and none of our reference material reflects such a program. Perhaps it was a locally produced broadcast, on a religious or educational station. Perhaps another *Digest* reader will remember and offer to help you recall it.)

LYONS, IL-- I'd like to correct an error in the article "All in the Family" in the April/May 199 issue. Writer Bob Kolososki states that Jamie Lee Curtis has never appeared in a film with her mother Janet Leigh. This is incorrect. Jamie Lee has appeared in two films with her mother -- *The Fog* (1980) and *Halloween: H2O* (1998). Although they did not act in any scenes together in *The Fog*, Jamie Lee and Janet did exchange dialogue, albeit briefly, in a couple of scenes as headmistress and her secretary respectively in the latest installment of the Halloween horror series. --**JIM BERG**

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN-- Now I know why you have been using the recording of "Boo Hoo" on the Don Roth commercials for lo, these many years. (You said last

Saturday how much you love it!) But can't you find a version where the trumpet player doesn't screw up a note in the beginning? I have been cringing at that for years and it doesn't do the advertiser's message any good, either. --D. BLAKE
(ED. NOTE-- It doesn't?)

WILMETTE, IL-- The interviews with Bob Elson and Jack Brickhouse (*TWTD*, April 24, 1999) were entrancing. For me, Bob Elson goes back to the days when he was doing the home games of both the Sox and Cubs. I very much remember his going off to the service right in the middle of a White Sox doubleheader on a Sunday and Jack Brickhouse taking over. But my most cherished thoughts go back to his Pump Room days. At times, the shows were both in the afternoon and evening. Both you and Bob talked about his being a good listener; he was. What struck me, however, was something that preceded that quality: his genuine interest in people from everywhere.
--WILLIAM IBE

PEORIA, ARIZONA-- It is with pleasure that I renew our subscription. We have been with you since the early '70s. It always was an enjoyable experience to have you bring back my childhood memories each Saturday. Jack Benny was my favorite. February was the month to which I would look forward. However, we moved to sunny Arizona seven years ago and we cannot get your signal out here and we truly miss Saturdays with you. We return to the Chicagoland area periodically and turn on your fine program.

About three years ago, my family and I had the pleasure of visiting your studio and meeting you in person. I even had my picture taken with you. That picture still adorns our rec room. Anyway, keep up the good job of bringing enjoyable memories to people, young and old. --RICHARD AND CLYDEAN BENZ

OAK BROOK, IL-- I was introduced to your radio broadcast when I first moved to Chicagoland in November, 1989. Since then you've introduced me to such excellent programs as *Suspense*, *Nightbeat*, *Jack Benny*, *Pat Novak For Hire*, and much more! I've since "shared the wealth" of these shows by sharing them with my wife, family and friends and I've been a *Digest* subscriber for several years now.

I enjoy many contributors to both the *Digest* and the program. Ken Alexander is wonderful and I especially enjoyed reading Clair Schulz's article on Alan Ladd in the April-May issue. I just finished reading the June-July issue and thoroughly enjoyed it, I found Andy Ooms article "Radio Youth" exceptional. He conveyed to us, those not fortunate enough to be around during the Golden Age of Network radio, what those times were like. Incidentally, while traveling recently from Davenport, Iowa to Omaha, Nebraska, I stopped by an antique shop and picked up a copy of "Ten Years with your Neighbor Lady" with "WNAX, Sioux City, Iowa" emblazoned on the cover. Quite a timely find, eh?

I'll be moving to the Quad Cities (about two hours west of Chicagoland) later this year. Is the program broadcast on any stations which would allow me to continue listening? My Saturdays wouldn't be the same without you. --HOWARD OLLER

MILFORD, MICHIGAN-- While I lived in St. Charles, Illinois I very much enjoyed your show on Saturdays as well as the late night shows (taped 'em). Now living in the Detroit area, I realize that Old Time Radio is nowhere to be found. It used to be on at Midnight on 950: WWJ, but no more. They didn't respond when I asked why. Got any suggestions for the Detroit area? --PAUL SHAFER

OMAHA, NEBRASKA-- Enclosed is my renewal to the *Nostalgia Digest*. It will be even more valuable to me now because Mitchell Broadcasting of Omaha bought KHUB, 1340-AM of Fremont Nebraska. They changed the format to "news-talk." They also broadcast "When Radio Was" every weekday from 1 to 2 p.m. This is a far better time for me instead of WMAQ's midnight broadcast. Also, KIOS-FM (91.5) the Omaha Public School's FM station broadcasts an old time radio show once a week on Thursday at 10:30 a.m. I also enjoy WMAQ's two-hour broadcast of "When Radio Was" Saturday and Sunday from 10 p.m. to midnight. --ROBERT NORDAHL

SKOKIE, IL-- Thought your readers might like to know that Cincinnati radio station WSAI (1530 AM) for the most part can be heard rather well in the Chicago area broadcasting



MORE LETTERS

"When Radio Was" weeknights at 9 p.m. Chicago time. It comes in best using a good battery operated portable radio. Also WHO (1040 AM) from Des Moines, Iowa comes in rather well with some fading at 9 p.m. Chicago time on Sundays with an interesting program called "Rejection Slip Theater." They're worth a try. --KEN GREENBERG

SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN-- I so look forward and enjoy every issue of your magazine. However, I literally agonize over the fact that I and probably thousands of others are unable to receive the Saturday OTR show on stations WNIB-WNIZ. I even have trouble sometimes with WMAQ signal late at night. Hundreds of AM/FM stations are being broadcast on the Internet. Would that be possible for your FM station? --

THOMAS LA BOUVE

(ED. NOTE-- Our *Those Were The Days* broadcasts enjoy an excellent FM signal on stations WNIB-WNIZ, but the program is not and has never been syndicated to other stations throughout the country. Lately, we've had many inquiries about "webcasting" *TWTD* on the Internet, so we've decided to begin looking into this possibility. We won't promise it will happen, but we'll check out the possibilities. In the meantime, there are many ways one can find out if old time radio shows are being broadcast in other communities. A good way is to contact the local newspaper's media writer and ask what, if anything, is on the air locally. Even if OTR broadcasts are not reported in the paper, the writer *should* know about them. And if you're looking for "When Radio Was" or any of the other "Radio Spirits"-related broadcasts, check their website for complete listing of stations in the U.S. that carry the program, detailed program listings, and even a steady audio stream on the Internet: www.radiospirits.com

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN-- Thanks to you and Carl Amari and Stan Freberg, I get a chance to re-live my era and enjoy my old time radio favorites. --GEORGE MILAN

TINLEY PARK, IL-- I'm enjoying *Recollec-*

tions at Thirty and looking forward to the next great line-up of shows. --GARRETT BLATT

ELK GROVE VILLAGE, IL-- I really enjoy my Saturday afternoons with the old radio programs, especially the comedy programs like *Jack Benny*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *My Favorite Husband*, *Red Skelton* and many more. --LOUISE MOLFESE

DARIEN, IL-- Please keep the *Nostalgia Digest* coming this way! I enjoy each issue and seem to find something of interest each time I open the pages. The articles bring back many fond memories of days gone by, and help me to understand how much God has blessed me in this life! Thanks for the memories. --FR. KEVIN SHANLEY

SKOKIE, IL-- To begin, I want to say how much I enjoy reading the *Nostalgia Digest* and listening to many of the old time radio programs. Actually, I want to complain about the sad state of radio today. There are no radio shows as we knew them. There is lots of news, weather and traffic every ten minutes. How often can these things change, except for emergencies? Then, there are the constant commercials with their ever-present conditions, exceptions, limits, and, my favorite, "dealer participation." What if no dealer participated, then what? The announcers also talk so fast you can't understand them. Now you know why I enjoy your *Digest* and old time radio programs. Thank you. --IRVING MASLOV

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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Vintage WLS

← WLS RADIO WENT ON THE AIR IN 1924

and this year observes its 75th Anniversary. Read Wayne W. Daniel's story of the station's vintage years. Page 26.

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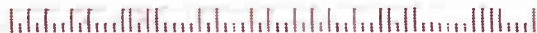
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