



Fire Chief



Happiness Boys



Ozzie, Harriet, Joe Penner



Baby Snooks

# A CHRONICLE OF POPULAR PROGRAMS

CHANGING national conditions, from boom to bust to war to cold war, have been mirrored by NBC's changing pattern of programming through the past quarter-century. As different times brought different tastes, so NBC's program executives have sought to keep their offerings in tune with public preferences in entertainment and education.

In the lush days of the late 20's,

## NBC Silver Jubilee

when NBC was first attempting the never easy job of simultaneously pleasing listeners in all parts of the land, the most popular programs were lavish musical shows, with name orchestras and star soloists. Recalling some of those early top-ranking programs—*Atwater Kent Hour*, *Cliquot Club Esquimos*, *Cities Service Program*, *A & P Gypsies*, *Ipana Troubadors*, *Palmolive Hour*, *Lucky Strike Dance Orchestra*—it apparently did not matter much what type of music was broadcast so long as it was good in its kind.

When the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting began measuring network program audiences in 1930

it found "dance music and dialogue in general rated well." Dialogue on the air was then the patter of the vaudeville stage, transferred to the radio studio almost without change. Top rated program, however, was *Amos 'n' Andy*, whose spectacular success with situation comedy was already spawning a multitude of imitators.

Mysteries began replacing dance bands in public favor in the 1931-1932 winter season. CAB then found minstrel shows, mystery dramas, news topics and serials the most popular program types. Top rated NBC programs in 1932 were *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Chase & Sanborn Program* with Eddie Cantor, *Fleischmann Hour*—Rudy Vallee and guests, *Blackstone Plantation*—Crumit and Sanderson, *Lucky Strike Dance Hour*.

Early 1933, bringing the first days of the New Deal, the bank crisis, Lindbergh kidnapping and California earthquake, saw the public "demonstrating its instinctive reliance upon radio spot news in times of intense excitement," A. W. Lehman, managing director of the CAB, noted. Dramatic programs were on the upgrade, with mysteries leveling off in popularity.

Comedians, too, began to come

into their own: Jack Benny took his first steps toward radio fame in a weekly series for Chevrolet. On NBC in 1933, the most popular programs were *Chase & Sanborn* with Eddie Cantor, *Fleischmann Hour* with Rudy Vallee, *Texaco Fire Chief*—Ed Wynn, *Show Boat*—Lanny Ross, *Bakers' Broadcast*—Joe Penner; three comedians among the top five programs.

## Benny No. 1

The same five NBC programs topped that network's roster in popularity in 1934, but the following year saw Jack Benny's *Jello Program* in the number one spot and Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight* ranked fifth, with the Vallee, Ross and Penner shows in between. Meanwhile, radio had discovered amateur shows and 1936 found *Major Bowes' Amateur Hour* the most popular NBC program, followed by Messrs. Benny, Vallee, Allen and Ross.

The absence of *Major Bowes* from the list of NBC top audience programs in 1937 and the appearance of Bing Crosby's *Kraft Music Hall* on that list marked the flowering of the variety show, which had developed through a sort of

merger of the dance band programs and dialogue acts of the early days of radio. By 1938, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, as stars of the *Chase & Sanborn Hour*, headed the NBC popularity list, followed by Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Fred Allen and Bing Crosby.

Summarizing 1939's program trends in the 1940 BROADCASTING YEARBOOK, Mr. Lehman noted "a greater amount of total listening, a greater amount of listening to leading programs and a greater reluctance on the part of advertisers to keep a poorly rated program on the air." The disturbed international situation leading to the outbreak of war in September kept more people listening longer and boosted figures to new highs, a trend that continued into 1940.

News programs became must listening. A CAB study showed that the average Wednesday evening audience for network news programs from 5 to 8 p.m. in the winter of 1939-40 was 39% above the average for 1938-39, while the 8 p.m. to midnight network news audience increased 55% in that year.

Pure entertainment was still the most sought-after radio fare, however. Jack Benny, Bergen and Mc-

Allen's Alley and Inhabitants



Rudy Vallee, Graham McNamee

