

Everyone Takes Part With Radio Commercials

“Get some *Golden Fluffo*..... real soon.”

-- Red Barber

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

When network radio began, the networks didn't have the luxury of having people who specialized in only specific speaking jobs. In other words, if a person spoke in front of a microphone, he/she was inclined to present a variety of things from news, to hosting a program, to the subject of this article---doing radio commercials (when direct selling on the air was allowed). This article will focus on some famous people who were better known for other roles on the radio than presenting radio commercials.

Gabriel Heatter was one of the most popular news commentators of radio's golden age. On his newscasts, Heatter wasn't bashful in changing the subject from a major news event to selling *Kreml Hair Tonic*. Instead of an overwhelming direct sell, Heatter casually talked about *Kreml* and the good things it did for men's hair. When he was about to finish, Heatter asked the housewives to make sure there was a bottle of *Kreml* where hubby could easily reach it--- and thanked them for their trouble.

Heatter didn't just sell products on his newscast. He was also the commercial spokesman for *Peter Paul* candy bars. It was here when Heatter used a different advertising tactic. Instead of the casual, easy going manner I mentioned earlier, Heatter put the power of resistance to an **extreme** test. He made *Mounds* and *Almond Joy* sound so irresistible, the radio listeners were easily persuaded to go to their favorite store and buy a *Mounds* and/or *Almond Joy* candy bar **at that moment**.

Sportscaster Red Barber made a name for himself as the legendary voice of the Brooklyn Dodgers and later the New York Yankees. When he wasn't doing play-by-play, Barber was selling *Old Gold Cigarettes* on different programs for CBS during the 1940's. Using his country boy technique that made him famous to baseball fans, Barber informed the listeners of the pleasant taste and cool smoking *Old Gold* provided. He also talked about “**Apple Honey**,” *Old Gold's* natural ingredient to preserve the freshness and moisture of the tobacco leaves before they were manufactured.

As an announcer, Barber was remembered best as the commercial spokesman for *Old Gold Cigarettes*, but he was also the commercial spokesman for an unlikely product--- *Golden Fluffo Shortening*.





If you are not familiar with *Fluffo*, it was the modern shortening of the 1950's created by *Procter & Gamble*. Its color was golden yellow instead of white that other shortening brands were known for. To someone who saw *Fluffo* for the first time, his/her first thought was it looked rancid--- but strangely, with no overwhelming bad smell to go with it. *Fluffo* was golden yellow by design due to the carotene content it had. Instead of frying food to an uneventful golden yellow, using *Fluffo* enhanced that golden yellow color. For baking, *Fluffo* helped to make lighter cakes and a flaky, lighter tasting, and golden pie crust than the competition. Although it looked like butter or margarine, *Fluffo* wasn't a table spread--- unless someone in the listening audience ate shortening on their bread (remember, there is a song called *Shortnin' Bread*).

Getting back to the commercial, its format had Barber interviewing housewives who won blue ribbons for their cooking and baking creations. Of course, the housewives used *Fluffo*. Like he did selling *Old Gold*, Barber used his familiar country boy approach in his commercial presentation for *Fluffo*. ■

Before he became the voice of the New York Yankees and goodwill ambassador for Major League Baseball, Mel Allen started his radio career as an announcer. During the late 1930's and early 1940's, Allen was selling *Ivory Soap* and *Crisco* on different daytime serials the 2 products sponsored. On a particular broadcast*, Allen also displayed his singing ability in an *Ivory Soap* musical commercial with Ralph Edwards--- **HOW ABOUT THAT!** ■ (*-I think the commercial was presented on **TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES**, but it's inconclusive).

When he wasn't doing **NBC Radio's** play-by-play of the weekly college football game, Fort Pearson worked during the week as a radio announcer. On a historical note, Pearson was (I believe) the first of a long list of announcers for **THE GUIDING LIGHT**. He was heard selling *PandG Naphtha Soap*, the program's first sponsor. In later years, Pearson sold *Kix* on **BEAT THE BAND** and *Alka-Seltzer* on **QUEEN FOR A DAY**. Pearson had a convincing style of speaking voice that when he said *PandG Naphtha Soap* washed clothes "**Really White,**" there was no doubt whatsoever.

Edwin C. Hill was another distinguished radio journalist. His talents on the air expanded to program M.C.--- and commercial spokesman. During a 1939 newscast, Hill easily changed from the somber news of that moment to an informative and upbeat commercial for *Amoco's Orange American Gas*. ■

Although *Amoco Gas* was better known of *Amoco's* 2 gasoline grades, Hill informed the listeners that *Orange American Gas* was also a quality gasoline to use. For those people who preferred regular gasoline, Hill assured them that *Orange American Gas* was a "**pure, sweet product**" that was 100% petroleum--- and 0% impurities and gunk that could hamper an engine's performance. At the end of the commercial, Hill asked the listeners to stop at the *Orange American Pump* and give *Orange American Gasoline* a tryout. It may be the first of many visits to the listeners' *Amoco* stations.



Presenting commercials on the air wasn't reserved for famous journalists, announcers, and sportscasters--- or even men for that matter! In addition to the various character roles she played in the 1930's, actress Bess Johnson was also one of the few female announcers of network radio. On the **WAYNE KING'S ORCHESTRA** program, Ms. Johnson presented the commercials for the program's sponsor, **Lady Esther Cosmetics** in the role of Lady Esther. According to an article in the May 28, 1938 issue of **Radio Guide** magazine, Ms. Johnson's portrayal of Lady Esther stirred up some controversy, because some people believed that **all** radio commercials should be done by men. To focus into this controversy, **Radio Guide** featured the article, "**Should Radio Use Women Announcers?**" To answer the question the best way as possible, the article took an equal view of both sides with 12 people (6 from each side) who either worked on radio or were radio listeners. In an interesting turn of events, of the 6 people who favored female announcers, 4 were men--- and of the 6 who didn't favor them, 3 were women. From a personal viewpoint, Ms. Johnson had an outstanding speaking voice, and she could present radio commercials as good as any announcer, male or female. Besides, can you picture Lady Esther on the air with a man's voice??!!



Bess Johnson

Regardless what the people thought of her as Lady Esther, it didn't discourage Ms. Johnson from presenting radio commercials. When the **Columbia** serial **PALMOLIVE'S HILLTOP HOUSE** made its debut, Ms. Johnson played the lead role (who happened to be named Bess Johnson), the manager of the Hilltop House Orphanage. Frank Gallop was the program's announcer, but it was Ms. Johnson who presented the commercials for the sponsor, **Palmolive Soap**. ■ Ms. Johnson's announcing duties didn't hamper the popularity of **PALMOLIVE'S HILLTOP HOUSE**, as it was among the most popular daytime serials of the late 1930's

This is only a short list of some big names in radio doing their part in selling the product to the radio listeners. It also demonstrated the "**team effort**" of the people to make network radio successful--- and considering the golden age lasted as long as it did, they succeeded.