

Coffee Gives Amateurs A Chance On NBC(Red) Talent Show

“Buy a bag of *Chase & Sanborn Dated Coffee*..... tomorrow.”

--- Charlie O'Connor

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

Beginning in 1929, Sunday evenings at 8:00 PM (or 8:30 PM) on NBC's **Red Network** meant it was time for the *Chase & Sanborn* radio program to air. In its 19-year stint during this time slot, the coffee sponsored some of radio's most popular programs--- including **THE CHASE & SANBORN HOUR** starring Eddie Cantor, which achieved the highest listener rating number during radio's golden age. Its 58.6 C.A.B. (Co-Operative Analysis of Broadcasting) Rating during the 1932-1933 season even topped **AMOS 'n' ANDY's** amazing 53.4 C.A.B. number during the 1930-1931 season.

Of course, Cantor's impressive numbers was welcomed news for *Chase & Sanborn*--- but it didn't last. After the Sunday, November 25, 1934 broadcast, Cantor left the program. He later resurfaced on February 3, 1935 on the **Columbia Network** for *Pebeco Tooth Paste*. As for *Chase & Sanborn*, the coffee had to find the next blockbuster radio program. It took awhile, but that program became a reality on Sunday, March 24, 1935 with **MAJOR BOWES' ORIGINAL AMATEUR HOUR**.

■ This program wasn't the first talent program to make its debut, but it went down in history as broadcasting's most famous and longest running talent program.

Major Edward Bowes was the program's M. C. He began each broadcast with the “**Weekly Wheel Of Fortune.**” “**Around and around she goes, and where she stops, nobody knows.**” While he made the amateurs at ease before performing, Major Bowes' “**co-star**” put the fear into everyone who was performing on the broadcast. This co-star was the infamous gong. More on what the gong did later.

If you know your American History, 1935 was right in the grip of The Great Depression. With jobs so scarce, many people hoped they could achieve fame by bringing their talents to the Major Bowes

program.

In the *Chase & Sanborn* print ads, it was mentioned that for every bag of *Chase & Sanborn* purchased, it gave another amateur a chance to perform on the program. Needless to say, a lot of *Chase & Sanborn Dated Coffee* bags were purchased at every store in the U.S. that sold it.

The amateurs who appeared on the program brought a wide range of talent to the **NBC** microphone. Some of the talent consisted of singing and dancing, but there were some unusual talent like barnyard imitations; playing a harmonica with an air tube; and some bizarre forms of entertainment that made the program an event the listeners looked forward to each week--- while they drink a cup or 2 of that delicious *Chase & Sanborn* coffee.

Since these people were amateurs, the talent (or lack of same) varied. There were some exceptional acts, while others met the fate of Major Bowes tapping the gong with his little hammer. With that sound, the act was automatically over--- and it could get very interesting. For the most part, the gonged amateurs took it with disappointment, but nothing eventful. However, not everyone took the gong as graciously. There were emotions from crying to physical threats against Major Bowes. With the possibility of physical violence, there were some pretty rugged men nearby in case a testy amateur made any threatening advance toward Major Bowes. It was this unpredictability that made **MAJOR BOWES' ORIGINAL AMATEUR HOUR** a popular program.

There were a couple of moments on the program when Major Bowes didn't dare sound off the gong--- and it was a greater threat than any rugged amateur getting gonged. These moments were the commercials for the sponsor, *Chase & Sanborn Dated Coffee*.

In the enclosed commercial, substitute announcer Charlie O'Connor informed the listeners that iced *Chase & Sanborn Coffee* was a delicious way to cool off on those hot summer evenings. ■ He explained to make the coffee a little stronger than usual, because the ice will dilute it when placed into the drink. Iced *Chase & Sanborn* tasted better than any other coffee, because it was the freshest coffee. Instead of packaging it in tin cans, *Chase & Sanborn* used paper bags. This kept the coffee fresh inside and it costs less than the other coffee. Since the date was printed on each bag, the users knew exactly how fresh the content in each *Chase & Sanborn* bag was.

The program's association with *Chase & Sanborn* was a very good one. It achieved a 45.2 **Hooper Rating**, the highest rating for the 1935-1936 season. Unfortunately, it was an association that was all too very brief. After an 18-month run, the program aired its final *Chase & Sanborn*--- and **NBC(Red)** broadcast on Sunday, September 13, 1936. The following Thursday (September 17, 1936), **MAJOR BOWES' ORIGINAL AMATEUR HOUR** began its long association with the **Columbia Network** and **Chrysler Corporation**.

Once again, it was back to the drawing board for *Chase & Sanborn*. It took a couple of seasons, but *Chase & Sanborn* was on top of the radio world with the latest format of **THE CHASE & SANBORN HOUR**. It took a lot of genius to hire a dummy for the new show, but with the services of Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, **THE CHASE & SANBORN HOUR** was among the top rated radio programs during the late 1930's.

Major Bowes' program is another chapter in the interesting history of *Chase & Sanborn* as a radio sponsor. It's a history that featured the most popular and controversial radio programs of radio's golden age. From time to time, there will be other articles on the programs *Chase & Sanborn* sponsored during the golden age on this website and my website (dg125.com).