

The Old Time Radio Club

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THREE LITTLE WORDS

featured in

Check and Double Check

with

Amos 'n' Andy



HARMS

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[1930]

THREE LITTLE WORDS + NOBODY KNOWS BUT THE LORD + OLD MAN BLUES + RING DEM BELLS

MADE IN USA

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Kate McComb was Mother O'Neil

by *Bernard A. Drew*

Kate McComb didn't seek a professional acting career until she was in her early 50s.

Born in Sacramento, Calif., in 1872, McComb came east to attend boarding school. She studied piano, but at age 17 contracted pneumonia and her doctor discouraged her thoughts of a career as a concert pianist. He suggested singing as an alternative.

She married John Rector McComb (1862-1920). After he was stricken with cerebral meningitis they moved from New York City to settle in Great Barrington, Mass., hoping it would speed his recovery. McComb became the town's postmaster for six years beginning in 1914.

Kate McComb organized and participated in amateur dramatic production. The contralto sang an evening of song in June 1914 to benefit the local Visiting Nurse Association. She appeared in "Petticoat Perfidy" in Albany, N.Y., in May 1916. She was a soloist at Great Barrington's Episcopal Church, then became choir director at its Congregational Church in May 1918.

Shortly after her husband died, McComb lost her mother and her son left for college. She at first despaired, then decided to make the best of the situation and fulfill a lifelong dream. At age 52, she headed off, looking for acting possibilities. She landed a role in a stock production of "St. Elmo's Fire" in Waterbury Conn. Then she went to Broadway for "Juno and the Paycock," in which she spoke in an Irish accent (she mimicked a man she remembered who drove a sprinkling wagon in Great Barrington). Then came a small role in "Silver Flute." She also appeared with Parker Fennelly in the NBC radio program "Snow Village Sketches" in 1928-30.

McComb had a role in WJZ radio theater's "Trifles" in September 1930, followed by a part in the play "Mr. Gilhooly" at the Broadhurst Theater in New York. In March 1935 she played the lead in a radio sketch carried over WABC, "A House Divided." Also on Broadway, she was in "Blood Money," "Mongolia," "Riddle Me

This" and "No Questions Asked." She was Mrs. Kerrigan in "The Rise of the Goldbergs," another radio serial.

The actress played Ethel Chauvenet in "Harvey" at the Berkshire Playhouse in Stockbridge, Mass. "I did everything—coaching, producing, acting, singing. I couldn't help myself," she told *Radio Mirror* in 1935. "There was always the hunger driving me on."

McComb was best known as Mother O'Neill in "The O'Neills," a plum role in the program which began in June 1934 as a 15-minute daily soap opera on the Mutual Network. By the time it went off the air in 1943, it had also broadcast over CBS and NBC Red and Blue networks. It was about a close-knit family in the small town of Royalton. By the late 1930s it had a Hooper rating of nearly 10 points, "unusual for a daytime serial," according to radio historian John Dunning in *On the Air* (1998). It was carried over 126 stations.

McComb appeared during eight years of the serials run (for a time it was indeed sponsored by a soap company, Ivory). Widow O'Neill raised her children Danny and Peggy and, when they married kept a close watch on a growing clan.

"When the role of Mother O'Neill came along," *Radio Mirror* said, "she was ready for it, just as she had been ready when she finally got her chance on Broadway."

McComb the radio star didn't lose touch with Great Barrington. In 1936 she appeared in a skit for the Wyantenuck Country Club's 40th anniversary. In her later years, the actress made her winter home at the Earle Hotel in New York City and summered in Great Barrington.

McComb played Maggie in "The Strange Romance of Evelyn Winters" over CBS in 1944. She appeared at the Berkshire Playhouse in July 1950—again in "Harvey."

After her death in 1959, the McComb family (son John and his wife, actress Jane Moultrie) for two seasons sustained McComb's dramatic tradition with a permanent playhouse in Great Barrington. The theater never gained solid footing, however, and closed by 1961.

Curiously, despite the longevity of "The O'Neills," only a single 1938 episode survives, according to radio archivist Jay Hickerson.

Has anyone heard it?

The Detectives, The Cops, The Investigators and The Private Eyes

—
by DOM PARISI
(Part 7)

The wealthy, dashing, debonair man of leisure Lamont Cranston, *The Shadow*, wasn't a real detective. He was an "amateur criminologist" who had learned some strange powers in the Orient. Naturally he used those new-found forces to combat crime. We OTR buffs know all about this very popular radio series and we know what made it great.

It was on the air from 1937 through 1954 over CBS, NBC and Mutual. In reality the program started out on CBS in August 1930 on a show called "Detective Story." Jack La Curto first played the role when the character known as the Shadow was used as the narrator for "Detective Story" — not as the "invisible" Shadow we have come to know. Frank Readick, George Earle and Robert H. Andrews followed in that format.

Then in 1937 Orson Welles arrived on the scene to become *The Shadow* as we know him. Agnes Moorehead was heard as Margo Lane others quickly followed in the lead roles: Bill Johnstone, John Archer, Steve Courtleigh and Bret Morrison. Marjorie Anderson, Gertrude Warner, Leslie Woods, Laura Mae Carpenter and Grace Matthews appeared as Margo. Shrevie, the cabbie was played by Keenan Wynn, Alan Reed and Mandel Kramer, three radio greats. Commissioner Weston's role went to Dwight Weist, Kenny "Claghorn" Delmar, my man Santos Ortega and Ted de Corsia. Bret Morrison was the last Shadow. The most remembered sponsor was Blue Coal with its heating expert John Barclay. Around 200 episodes are available, but I think there should be more. Where are they?!

The "Loner" *The Lone Wolf* hung out at the Silver Seashell Bar and Grill when he wasn't tracking down criminals. Michael Lanyard, the Wolf was an ex-jewel thief turned detective. The show aired over Mutual in 1948-1949 and starred Gerald Mohr as the first Lone Wolf. Walter Coy took over in 1949. Jay Novello had the

part of his butler. Do you notice how many of these guys have butlers, housekeepers and chauffeurs? The pay must have been pretty good! At least 1 episode is available.

The Man Called X probably should be classified as an adventure rather than a detective show. I'll list it here anyway.

This long running show on just about all the networks ran from 1944 to 1952. Herbert Marshall, as U.S. Intelligence Agent Ken Thurstone worked and traveled the world over. The program started on July 10, 1944 over CBS. Leon Belasco played Thurstone's partner Pagan Zeldschmidt. As far as I can tell this was the only radio show that Belasco appeared in. John McIntire was one of the narrators. About 60 episodes are out there.

Following in the same style as *Man Called X* was *The Man From G-2*. An ABC 1945-1946 offer starred Staats Cotsworth as Major Hugh North, a U.S. Agent who fought the Nazis. Any shows available?

Dan Duryea, as Lieutenant Lou Dana, was the star of *The Man From Homicide* on ABC during 1951-1952. This was a cop who didn't stick to the rules. If some two-bit punk gave him a rough time Dana bounced back with his fists and his — "I don't like killers" attitude. Bill Bouchey (he played Captain Midnight when the program had a regional Chicago run) was Inspector Sherman and radio regular Larry Dobkin was the Sergeant Dave. I believe that only 2 episodes are in circulation.

Martin Kane, Private Detective first appeared on Mutual on August 7, 1949 sponsored by U.S. Tobacco. William Gargan starred as Kane and was replaced in 1950 by Lloyd Nolan. This show was one of the first radio detective programs to switch over to television. Others in the cast were Walter Kinsella as Happy McMartin and Nick Saunders as Sergeant Ross. There are 29 episodes floating around.

Adventures By Morse, a 1944 syndicated Carlton E. Morse production was a super adventure series that featured the cases of Captain Bart Friday, a San Francisco detective. Bart seeked and solved mysterious cases wherever the action took him. Elliott Lewis, David Ellis and Russell Thorson played Bart Friday. The episodes were serialized and ran 30 minutes once a week. A com-

plete serial was usually completed in 3 or 10 episodes. All 52 episodes are available.

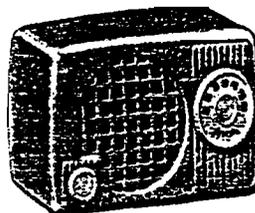
Mickey Mouse? No! *McGarry And His Mouse* was a little known 1946-1947 weekly comic detective series that aired over NBC and MBC. The show was tailored after a magazine series by Matt Taylor.

Roger Pryor, well known radio host, played Detective Dan McGarry. Others to hold the role were Wendell Corey and Ted de Corsia, another pair of radio stars. I have not heard an episode of *McGarry*, but considering who some of the performers were, the show must of had something going for it: — Shirley Mitchell, Peggy Conklin and Patsy Campbell all played the character Kitty Archer. Thelma Ritter was even there as Kitty's mother. The announcer was Bert (there she goes) Parks. There was a group of well established players associated with this radio broadcast. 2 episodes are available.

Michael Shayne, a "reckless red-headed Irishman," was heard first on the west coast Don Lee Network on October 16, 1944. Two years later Shayne moved to Mutual and then to ABC as *The New Adventures of Michael Shayne*: Wally Maher was the original Shayne, Louise Archer played his helper Phyllis Knight. On Mutual Cathy Lewis was Phyllis. In 1948-1950, Jeff Chandler took over as Mike Shayne. Robert Sterling had the lead in the 1952-1953 season. Chandler as Private-Eye Shayne was a tougher cop than Maher. Like other radio detectives he wasn't one to waste time with a two-time loser. There are 28 episodes out there. The only ones I've heard are the shows with Jeff Chandler. Has anyone heard an episode with Robert Sterling?

Two movie greats, Lloyd Nolan and Claire Trevor starred in Mutual's 1944-1945 *Results, Incorporated*. Nolan was Detective Johnny Strange and Claire Trevor was his secretary Terry Travers. They ran an agency called Results, Inc. In the beginning Strange placed two ads in the local newspaper: — *Results, Incorporated*, "your problem is our problem . . ." The second ad read: "Secretary wanted, blonde, beautiful, between 22 and 28 years, unmarried, with the skin you love to touch and a heart you can't." Travers answered the second ad! Only 2 episodes available?

(to be Continued)



SAME TIME, SAME STATION

by Jim Cox

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

Walter O'Keefe was absolutely unsuspecting on Oct. 15, 1948 when he urged a waitress appearing as a guest on *Double or Nothing* — the quiz show O'Keefe hosted every afternoon on NBC — to share a few of her experiences with millions in the radio audience.

In a kind of earthy monotony, the young woman rambled on about a young man she knew who had grave emotional difficulties. After portraying the man's issues for a spell, she remarked that a female confidante had told her to advise him to "get a good-looking girl like yourself and take her home and just have a big screwing party!"

The flushed master of ceremonies, knowing the network censors would immediately cut his show off the air, abruptly changed the subject and accelerated the guest through the contest which followed. But the NBC switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree as irate callers who had heard the comments broadcast live up and down the eastern seaboard vented their anger. NBC's West Coast audiences had not yet been privy to this program because their local affiliates transcribed the show for rebroadcast later. The web issued an ultimatum that they were to cancel the show that day only and the transcriptions were to be destroyed.

That was one of the more mirthful incidents in the days of live network broadcasts, when the networks had a certain amount of control — yet obviously not total control — over what radio and studio audiences heard. No one could predict what a guest on any show might say, and the waitress must have single-handedly diminished broadcasting's standards that banned improper remarks by several years.

Quiz shows hadn't been around very long when *Double or Nothing* arrived on network radio Sept. 29, 1940. Broadcasting biographer Charles Stumpf claimed that

the first such program, identified as *Information Please* moderated by Clifton Fadiman, debuted only a couple of years earlier, May 17, 1938.

Double or Nothing was the brainchild of a college drama instructor and publicity director who had broken into radio as an announcer at a station in his hometown of Charleston, S. C. Walter Knobeloch, who soon changed his professional name to Walter Compton, was born in 1912. Moving from Charleston to stations in Columbia and Greenville, S. C., at 25 he was handling news and special events for Washington, D. C.'s WOL. Simultaneously, he was reporting White House news for the Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS).

At WOL Compton tried out his own concept for a quiz show called *Double or Nothing*. The idea clicked with MBS programmers. They put it on the air with Compton as emcee.

At its start, contestants were asked a question for a prize of \$5. Speaking extemporaneously, they would have a full minute to discuss the subject of the question while a loud clock ticked off the seconds. Compton dolled out more small sums (from \$2 to \$4) for data spouted off by players. At that point, he asked another question. For a correct answer, a contestant's prize could be doubled. But losing meant forfeiting all but the original \$5 earned for the initial question.

In later years the format was altered dramatically. When Walter O'Keefe was host, the last of four popular quizmasters to fill the radio slot, the first question was worth \$2, the second \$4 and so on until a \$10 platform was reached. Contestants could then bow out with what they had won or try for "double or nothing" with a final question. Eventually, a grand slam feature was added with a prize of \$80. Still larger sums were awarded in a "sweepstakes" at the show's end. Sponsored by the Campbell Soup Co., the show's participants weighed their answers in the final few seconds as a lively choral group belted out these lyrics:

*Campbell's brings you the red-and-white sweepstakes . . .
Campbell's pays it off again;
Take a try at the red-and-white sweepstakes,
Think about it, think about it, rack your brain!
Come on, and join, this funny-makin' caper,
If you know the answer, write it on your paper!
Walter, hey Walter, have we got a winner today . . .
Today . . .
Have we got a winner today?*

"No I'm sorry, we have no winner today," O'Keefe seemed to reply more often than "Yes, we do have a winner today." He'd identify any winner(s) and read the

answer to the question in the sweepstakes.

When *Double or Nothing* made it to television, the contest format was changed again. With Bert Parks as TV's master of ceremonies, five members of the studio audience competed to answer three questions correctly, qualifying for a jackpot worth double or nothing. The top prize on the video version was \$140. This series ran from 1952-54, part of the time three days weekly, partly two days weekly and partly at night once a week.

On radio, the half-hour show lasted from 1940-47 as a weekly nighttime feature on MBS (alternating spasmodically between various time periods on Sunday and Friday nights). It was sponsored by Feen-a-mint laxative chewing gum and Chooz breath mints.

On June 30, 1947 CBS added *Double or Nothing* to its weekday schedule at 3 o'clock EST. On May 31, 1948 NBC also picked it up at 2 o'clock, carrying it through Dec. 21, 1951 at that hour. Meanwhile, CBS dropped it June 25, 1948, but on April 24, 1950, NBC added a second daily broadcast at 10:30 a.m. The quiz transferred to its fourth network, ABC, June 22, 1953 where it aired weekdays at 11:30 a.m. until final cancellation Jan. 15, 1954. During its CBS, NBC and ABC days the show was sponsored by the Campbell Soup Co.

With a tenure lasting more than 13 years, unprecedented for a quiz program, *Double or Nothing* became one of radio's hardest quizzes. The agile ad-libbing of its hosts, plus its reputation for double entendres and subsequent confused situations (as in the case of the waitress), undoubtedly contributed to the program's longevity.

It's originator, Walter Compton, departed in 1943 to serve in the U. S. Armed Forces. Following the war he turned up in Baltimore and Washington TV outlets as a newsman and general manager. The catchphrase, "Thank you and thirty," became his trademark, "thirty" being a newsman's method of noting a story's conclusion. He was a charter member of the Radio and Television Correspondents Association. By 1957, two years before his death in Washington at the age of 47, Compton resumed his MBS radio career as a newscaster and commentator.

The second of *Double or Nothing's* hosts became a household name on daytime quiz programs. John Reed King, born at Atlantic City in 1914, ran game shows in wholesale lots, including *Break the Bank*, *Chance of a Lifetime*, *Give and Take*, *Go for the House*, *The Missus Goes A-Shopping*, *So You Think You Know Music* and *What's My Name?* He carried a couple of them to TV, *Give and Take* and *The Missus Goes A-Shopping*, and hosted *There's one in Every Family* and *Tootsie*

For a spell the versatile King played his popular fictional namesake *Sky King* on radio. He announced the serial *Our Gal Sunday* and several variety series — *The Mel Torme Show*, *The Stu Erwin Show*, *Texaco Star Theater*, *The Victor Borge Show*, *The Woman* (a syndicated series) and *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*. He died in 1979 at Woodstown, N. J. King was 64.

Todd Russell, who succeeded him on *Double or Nothing* in 1945, was the original host of *Strike it Rich*, appearing before Warren Hull's long career. Later, he hosted several TV series including *Pud's Prize Party*, a talent variety show; *Rootie Kazootie*, a children's show; and two game shows, *Wheel of Fortune* and *Who Do You Trust?*

The last of *Double or Nothing's* radio hosts, who stayed with it during the CBS/NBC/ABC era from 1947-54, was Walter O'Keefe, a comedian born at Hartford, Conn. in 1900. The former vaudevillian, who in 1937 was writing a humorous daily syndicated newspaper column, dabbled briefly in politics, directing a portion of candidate Wendell Wilkie's unsuccessful presidential bid in 1940.

His first broadcast series resulted from a stint performed while briefly replacing Walter Winchell on *The Lucky Strike Magic Carpet*. O'Keefe was the host of a show starring Don Bestor's Orchestra, the *Camel Caravan* with Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra. He did fill-ins for Fred Allen and Fred Astaire and was on wartime camp tours while serving in the Marines.

Taking over *The Breakfast Club* for vacationing Don McNeill, O'Keefe found his niche. He moved to *Double or Nothing* and thereby followed a string of radio shows for which he was emcee or announcer. *Battle of the Sexes*, *Camel Caravan*, *The Packard Hour*, *Two for the Money*, *The Walter O'Keefe Program* and *The Wizard of Odds*.

In 1982 he confessed that his greatest single achievement had been in conquering alcohol. The master of his craft, best recalled of those hosting *Double or Nothing*, died at Torrance, Calif. in 1983. He was 82

Double or Nothing's announcers included Fred Cole, Alois Havrilla and Murray Wagner. The program bounded onto the air each day to the tune of "Three Little Words."

The series proved that listeners at home were just as intrigued by its question-and-answer format as the contestants drawn from the studio audience. While it may have been a "bargain basement" rendition of the infinitely better known *\$64 Question*, as *DON* writer Carroll Carroll allowed, the durable quiz of radio's golden age set a pattern for dozens of imitators to follow.

Cincinnati's 12th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention

by R. A. Olday

Before I begin a review of the convention, I want to thank the many dealers who donated cassettes to our club library. We will be adding almost 100 new cassettes thanks to their generosity: (1.) Radio Memories, 1600 Wewoka St., North Little Rock, AR 72116 (2.) Great American Radio, Box 504, Genes, MI 48437 (3.) BRC Productions, P.O. Box 2645, Livonia, MI 48151 (4.) Vintage Broadcast, Box 50065, Staten Island, NY 100315 (5.) Leo H. Gawroniak, P.O. Box 248, Glen Gardner, NJ 08826. Members, when you buy from these dealers, please tell them that the Buffalo OTR Club referred you.

The dealer's room opened officially at noon on Friday May 29, 1998 but several sales had been completed well before that hour. A larger room inside the hotel was still completely filled with dealers and a waiting list is already set-up for next year's convention. Of course I spent most of the afternoon checking out the various wares and spending lots of money.

Friday evening festivities started at 7:30 PM with the Boogie Woogie Girls and Company E (Ed & Nina Clute). Even though one of the girls was a substitute (Janice Slocum), the performance was very good. By the way, Janice also turned in excellent performances in the OTR recreations. Next up was the always funny Ethel & Albert starring Peg Lynch & Bob Hastings with John Rayburn announcing. Rounding out the evening was Archie Andrews starring Bob Hastings recreating his old role from over 50 years ago and sounding the same (America's oldest teenager? - 73). A very entertaining evening.

The dealer's room opened at 9 AM on Saturday (yes, I bought some more "goodies"). Two Amos & Andy shows were sandwiched around a funny sound effects skit. Amos and Andy were superbly portrayed by Dave Warren & John Rayburn. At 1:30 in the afternoon, The Boogie Woogie Girls again entertained us. This was followed by another Ethel & Albert skit and The Green Hornet played by John Rayburn. Unfortunately, Fred Foy was unable to attend the convention due to another commitment. Fred was originally scheduled to play the Hornet, But John Rayburn was a fine substitute.

Approximately at 7 PM after dinner, Ed Clute played requests (the sound was not right & I don't know whether this was due to the instrument or the sound system). Following Ed's music, the Boogie Woogie Girls performed their final songs of the convention. This was followed by two more Ethel & Albert skits and a Pat Novak For Hire show starring John Rayburn.

As usual it was great seeing many friends at the convention & Arlene & I have reserved next April 24 weekend for the 1999 convention. Many thanks to Bob Burchett and all his many helpers in making this another great convention.

LEST WE FORGET

**Those Who Forget the Past,
Should be Condemned to
Repeat It**

In this troubled world today, my thoughts drift back and I start reminiscing about . . . I wonder whatever became of the Military Service men during WW II, strangers to our city, on leave, heading for the nearest U.S.O. for an evening of dancing to the music of the big bands — and a little conversation to forget the fact that they are miles away from home, their wife, and their best girl . . . The sheet music department of the local 5c and 10c store, with the piano-playing sales-person who would play the song you picked out before each sale . . . The sound-proof booth in your local music store, where you played the old 78 rpm before you buy — and sometimes didn't (your oft-times excuse was that it was the wrong band or vocalist) . . . The 45 rpm RCA record player that came out after WW II, that — if you had the models with the phone jack in the rear — you could hook-up to your radio and play your "45's" through the big 12 inch speaker in your console . . . The Arundel ice cream "parlor" in your local neighborhood where you congregated after school, with the Wurlitzer Juke-Box playing the latest hits of Miller, Dorsey, Goodman and the like, and the little 5' x 8' dance floor in the back. (Sometimes a 5c Coke lasted all afternoon, much to the dismay of the matronly counter lady in her nice green and white uniform.) The "cool-off" rides on the street cars during the summer that ended at the local dance pavilion in Gwynn Oak Park, where you danced all night to a new tune that just hit number one on "Your Hit Parade," or listened to the music piped into the loud-speakers surrounding the park, as you and your best date went for a boat ride on the moon-lit lake. (For

50c you could ride the pedal boats all night long until closing) . . . The radio stars who appeared at the Hippodrome Theatre "down-town." You were the first in line to see if they looked the same way you imagined they would in your "theatre of the mind." (If they were not the same, you closed your eyes while they performed, where the "magic and power" of radio took over) . . . And finally, whatever became of the radio sales and service stores that always had a radio program playing through a loud speaker over the door, in hopes you would stop and listen and maybe — just maybe — come inside and see the newest radio models. Ahh! Memories . . . Memories . . . Memories.

Owens L. Pomeroy
Golden Radio Buffs Of Md., Inc.

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**23rd Friends of Old Time Radio
Convention**

**October 22 - 24, 1998
Holiday Inn North
Newark, New Jersey**

West Coast Guests: Mason Adams, *Pepper Young's Family* - Kirk Alyn, (Serials) *Adventures of Superman* - Dick Beals, *The Lone Ranger, Gunsmoke* - Ray Erienborn, (Sound effects artist) - Bob Hastings, *Archie Andrews*, (TV) *McHale's Navy* - Bob Mott, (Sound effects artist) - Elliott Reid, *March of Time, Lorenzo Jones*

New East Coast Guests: Kay Armen, (Singer) *Kay Armen Sings* - Frances Chaney, *The Adventures of Topper, Terry and the Pirates* - Jill Corey, (Singer) (TV) *Your Hit Parade* - Mary Diveny, (TV, Broadway, Movies, Radio) (WENY, Elmira, NY) - Toni Gillman, *Life Begins, Young Widder Brown*

Returnees:
Arthur Anderson, *Let's Pretend, Hotel for Pets* - George Ansbro, (Announcer) *ABC* - Barney Beck, (Sound Effects Artist) - Jackson Beck, (Announcer) *Superman, Mark Trail* - Lon Clark, *Nick Carter* - Dick Dudley, (Announcer) *Archie Andrews* - Earl George - *Captain Midnight, Doc Savage* - Ed Herlihy, (Kraft Spokesman) - Pat Hosley, *A Brighter Day* - Will Hutchins, (TV) *Blondie, Sugarfoot* - Betty Johnson, (Singer) *Breakfast Club* - Raymond Edward Johnson, *Inner Sanctum* - Ruth Last, *Let's Pretend, Quiet Please* - Peg Lynch, *Ethel and Albert* - Ted Mallie, (Announcer) *The Shadow* - Bill Owen (Announcer for Mutual) - Carmel Quinn (Singer) *Arthur Godfrey* - Clive Rice, *Bobby Benson* - Ken Roberts, (Announcer) *The Shadow, Ellery Queen* - Adele Ronson, *Buck Rogers, John's Other Wife* -

Margot Stevenson, *The Shadow* - Sybil Trent, *Let's Pretend* - Betty Wragge, *Pepper Young's Family*

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'Buffalo Bob' Children's TV Pioneer, Dies

"Buffalo Bob" Smith whose *Howdy Doody Show* on early television entertained a generation of America's children is dead. The onetime Buffalo radio personality died July 30th of cancer in a hospital in Hendersonville, N.C. He was 80.

The *Howdy Doody Show*, one of national television's first children's offerings, aired from 1947 to 1960 on NBC and featured — in addition to the freckled puppet, Howdy Doody — the now classic Clarabell the Clown and Princess Summerfall Winterspring. Even after the show stopped airing, its opening line was repeated for decades: "Hey kids, what time is it?" *"It's Howdy Doody time!"*

Buffalo Bob remained known to many of his early fans — in the "Peanut Gallery" and at home — as the most popular children's TV personality of all time.

Smith returned to Buffalo in September 1997 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his alma mater, the former Fosdick-Masten Park High School, now City Honors.

"It was a music teacher named Drusilla Stengel that taught me all about music," he recalled then. "When I graduated in 1933, Prohibition had ended, and I joined with two other students, Johnny Eisenberger and Elmer Hattenberger, as a singing trio on a radio show sponsored by Simon Beer."

Born Robert Emil Schmidt in a home on Chester Street on Buffalo's East Side, he was brought up only blocks

away, at 186 Roehrer Ave. and went to School 53. Robert took piano lessons from the age of 8, instructed by Buffalo music teacher Clara Mueller Pankow. In high school, he taught himself to play all the instruments in the school band as well.

Smith's show business career began when Kate Smith heard the Fosdick-Masten trio the Hi-Hatters, on the Simon Supper Club of the air and invited them to New York City. She put them on radio's Hudson Terraplane Hour which, in turn, thrust them onto the vaudeville circuit. "We hit the big time early," Smith recalled in 1987, "but we got homesick, and so we came back home."

Smith continued to sing. He also became a staff pianist at WGR, then WBEN. At WBEN, he was paired with local radio giant Clint Buehlman on a morning audience participation show. In 1946, he left WBEN to become morning man for New York City NBC radio affiliate. He also was host for a children's Saturday quiz program on the radio station — "The Triple B (Big Brother Bob) Ranch." "I had this little Mortimer Snerdish country-bumpkin character," he recalled in 1983. "He was originally called Elmer. He'd come out and say, 'Uh-huh-huh, Howdy Doody, kids!' So the kids naturally started calling him that." Soon those children began clamoring to see the nasal-voiced Howdy — and Smith talked his bosses into a children's show on NBC-TV, which debuted Dec. 27, 1947. He called it "Puppet Playhouse" at first, then the "Howdy Doody Show."

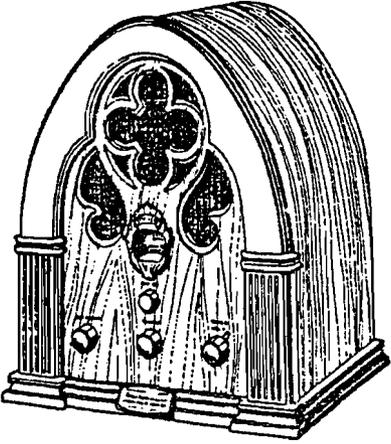
As the show increased in popularity, heading TV ratings for more than a decade, Smith became known as "the world's highest priced baby sitter." Carrying the name "Buffalo Bob" from the show's beginning, he brought his mother, Emma, on TV several times as "Buffalo Emma," and named other characters on the show after people he knew in Buffalo, including "Buffalo Clint" for Buehlman. Cops, doctors, businessmen, musicians — Smith had Buffalo names for them all. Some were so unusual, they drew laughs. "Television executives in New York think I'm a genius for thinking up these names," Smith said of the latter. "Actually, they're all members of my old church, Emmaus Lutheran."

In 1993, Smith was inducted into the Western New York Entertainment Hall of Fame. Earlier a room was named for him in the Buffalo Convention Center.

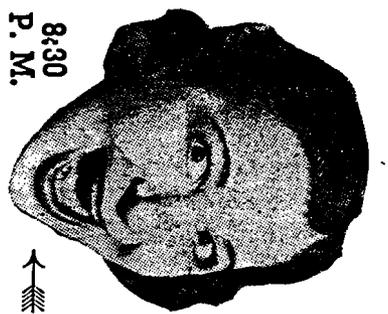
Surviving, in addition to his wife Mildred, are three sons, Robin, Ronald and Christopher: three grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

Old Time Radio Club
 Box 426
 Lancaster, NY 14086

FIRST CLASS MAIL



RAYMOND MASSEY as LINCOLN in CAVALCADE
 DRAMA at 8: "THE THINKING HEART"

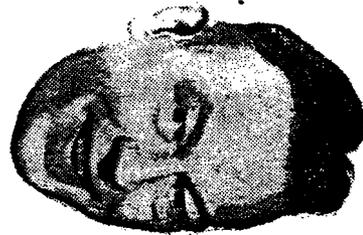


8:30
 P. M.

↑ Fanny Brice as Snooks!

Comedy
Night On
WBEN

FRED ALLEN and BOB HOPE



Ad Lib
 Battle
 of the
 Year!
 At
 9 P. M.



FIBBER and ART LINKLETTER



The
 McGees!
 9:30
 *
 "People
 Are
 Funny!"
 10:30



WBEN-FM (106.5 mc., Chan. 293), 1:15 P. M.—Luncheon
 Club; 1:30—FM School; 2 to Midnight—WBEN Shows