

The Main Event: Sealtest Variety Theater

“Well, it sure has been plenty of fun here at
Glenn McCarthy’s Shamrock Hotel in Houston
as you can hear on the air.”

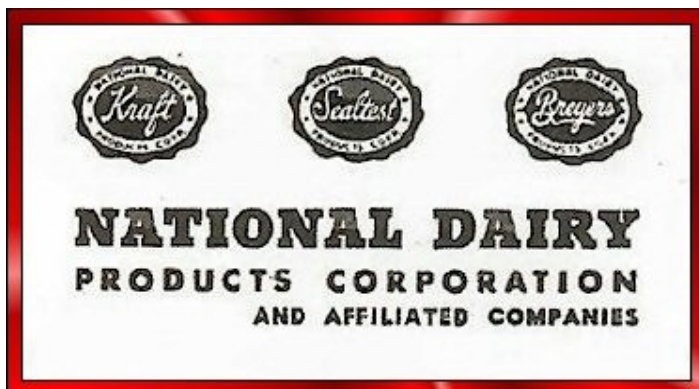
---Dorothy Lamour

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

For the majority of the time, a typical radio program during the golden age was presented on the air with very little problem. However, there were those times when things don’t go quite the way they were supposed to. More often than not, these glitches were minor and weren’t even noticed by the listeners. However, there was a moment in the history of old time radio where “**Murphy’s Law**” was running roughshod all over the place. This unfortunate situation took place on the Thursday, March 17, 1949 broadcast of the **SEALTEST VARIETY THEATER** with Dorothy Lamour.

As with other variety programs during the golden age, the **Sealtest** program went on location to do a broadcast. For this particular broadcast, it was a remote from the Shamrock Hotel in Houston. Ms. Lamour’s guests on the broadcast were Van Heflin and Ed “Archie” Gardner of **DUFFY’S TAVERN** fame. On paper, it was the luck of the Irish that the program took place from the Shamrock Hotel on St. Patrick’s Day. If only the actual broadcast was performed on paper!

On the night of the broadcast, a small problem was quickly developing into a major catastrophe. The room at the hotel where the broadcast was taking place was supposed to hold 1000 people. When the doors opened and the people were let in, there were considerably more than 1000 people--- and they weren’t exactly orderly coming in. If anyone was to witness what was going on, it resembled a pro wrestling battle royal as to who would get the 1000 reserved seats.



With an unruly crowd, things couldn’t get any worse--- or could they? On this night, it got worse! When the program began, there were audio problems. The listeners could barely hear the program get under way. The audio problems continued throughout the program’s first segment. Moments before the first commercial break, the listeners couldn’t hear Ms. Lamour and her guests, but they did hear a

technician in the control room utter profane language while trying to straighten out the audio problems. Mercifully, it was time for the commercial. Surprisingly, the listeners had no problem hearing commercial spokesman Frank Barton talk about “**Whistling Good**” *Kraft Cottage Cheese*. The reason why the commercial was loud and clear was because Barton presented it at the safe confines of the **NBC** studios in Hollywood. When Barton finished the commercial, it was back to the chaos in Houston.

When the program returned, there was both “**good news**” and “**bad news**.” The good news was the audio problems were gradually being corrected. The bad news was the crowd was still unruly, while Ms. Lamour and her guests were trying their best to continue with the show.

With the pushing and shoving continuing, the program was definitely off schedule. After an impromptu musical interlude from Henry Russell’s orchestra, it was time for the second commercial. Once again, it was back to the **NBC** studios in Hollywood, where spokesman Barton flawlessly delivered the second commercial for *Kraft Cottage Cheese*.

When the program returned to the air, the pushing, shoving, fighting, and loud talking continued (what a surprise). It was the latter stages of the program, and Ms. Lamour, Heflin, and Gardner were trying to perform the closing sketch centered around “Archie,” Gardner’s character on *DUFFY’S TAVERN*. Unfortunately, the unruly crowd was finally starting to get on Gardner’s nerves. Instead of reading the lines of the sketch, he started to ad-lib and made very sarcastic comments about the rude people in attendance. When Gardner was starting to get out of hand, Ms. Lamour calmly reminded him to continue the sketch for the radio listeners’ sake. Being the professional that he was, Gardner took her advice and continued with the sketch as it was scripted. Unfortunately, the program was hopelessly behind schedule, and the sketch was stopped before it was finished.

Another musical interlude and final commercial (bravely done by the announcer John Laing at the hotel) closed out the program. With the crowd still pushing, shoving, and talking, Ms. Lamour said she and everyone associated with the program had a lot of fun at the Shamrock Hotel, and the next broadcast was to be presented at the **NBC** studios in Hollywood. The **NBC** chimes sounded off and the program mercifully ended. Overall, the program was a complete disaster--- except for the *Kraft Cottage Cheese* commercials.

With the Houston fiasco an unpleasant memory, the remaining broadcasts of *THE SEALTEST VARIETY THEATER* series were presented at the **NBC** studios in Hollywood, where the studio audience was well behaved. *Sealtest*, Ms. Lamour, and everyone associated with the program learned that going on location could be hazardous to their health.