

Not-So-Famous Products Were Radio Sponsors Part I

"And don't forget your change."

--- Closing of Avalon Cigarette commercial



Lincoln, Me. (DG)---

Since network radio began, many products either had their names on the programs they sponsored, or when direct selling became a reality, were featured in commercials. Many of these products are famous in the United States--- and in some cases, worldwide. We already know of *Ivory Soap's* floating ability, champion athletes eating *Wheaties*, and Johnny's call for *Philip Morris*. Since you already know about these products, we're **NOT** going to talk about them or any other famous product in this article. This is the first of a series of articles that will give those obscure products some recognition.

Let's begin with a product that was a mystery to me until a couple of months ago (as of February 3, 2001 when this article was being prepared). The product in question is *Cal-Aspirin*. When I was doing my own personal research on old time radio, I came across *Cal-Aspirin* as a sponsor of 3 different daytime serials during the 1930's and early 1940's. I did have a clue it was made by *Sterling Drug*, the people who made *Bayer Aspirin*--- which explained why I had a hard time finding it in the magazines I have. Not that they really care (and rightfully, they shouldn't), *Sterling Drug* is the most difficult company for a researcher (like me) to find its products in magazines that were printed during radio's golden age. While some brands were featured in magazine advertising, others were not. Unfortunately for me, *Cal-Aspirin* was an example of the latter. It wasn't until I surfed the Internet, when I found a picture of a *Cal-Aspirin* box--- and I would get an idea what kind of a product it was.

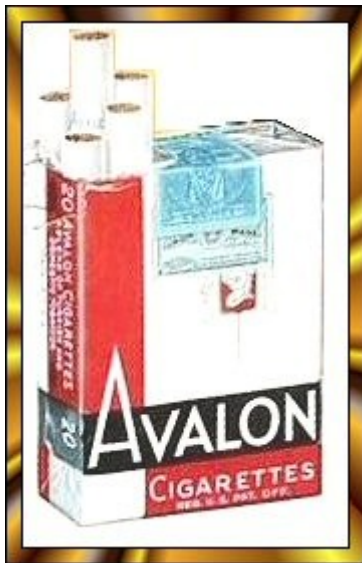


If you examine the name closely, *Cal-Aspirin* was what the name implied. It was a pain reliever that featured an unusual combination of calcium and aspirin. The tablets appear to be small in size, because they were packaged in a narrow tubular container. According to what it said on the box, it was 20¢ for 12 tablets. Whether or not the calcium helped to relieve pain I couldn't say, but the calcium could certainly help strengthen the bones inside the regulation human body.

As I stated earlier, *Cal-Aspirin* was either the sponsor or co-sponsor of (at least) 3 network daytime serial programs. During the 1935-1936 season, it was the sponsor of *PAINTED DREAMS* on *Mutual* and co-sponsored *NBC(Blue's) AMANDA OF HONEYMOON HILL* during its first 2 seasons (1940-1942) with *Haley's M-O*. While the 2 soaps had various successes, *Cal-Aspirin* achieved fame as being the very first sponsor of *YOUNG WIDDER BROWN*, which would become one of radio's most popular serials. Its fame was brief, because it sponsored the program for only its initial season before

turning the sponsoring duties over to **Bayer Aspirin**.

During the 1930's and 1940's, there were a lot of cigarette brands for a smoker to choose from. Of course, the people, smokers and non-smokers alike, knew of **Lucky Strike**, **Camel**, **Old Gold**, **Chesterfield**, and **Philip Morris** for the simple reason they were major sponsors of radio programs during the height of radio's golden age. The lesser known cigarette brands had a major uphill battle to compete against the 5 major brands. Despite the odds, **Avalon Cigarettes** gave it a try.



Avalon was a brand made by **Brown & Williamson**. Like the major cigarette brands, **Avalon** also used fine quality tobacco, while giving its smokers a mild smoke and a rich tobacco taste. The only difference between **Avalon** and the major brands was a noticeable one. It costs a few cents less. The radio commercials focused on the saving of money when a smoker bought **Avalon**. It closed with a cashier ringing a cash register and telling her customer, "**And don't forget your change.**"

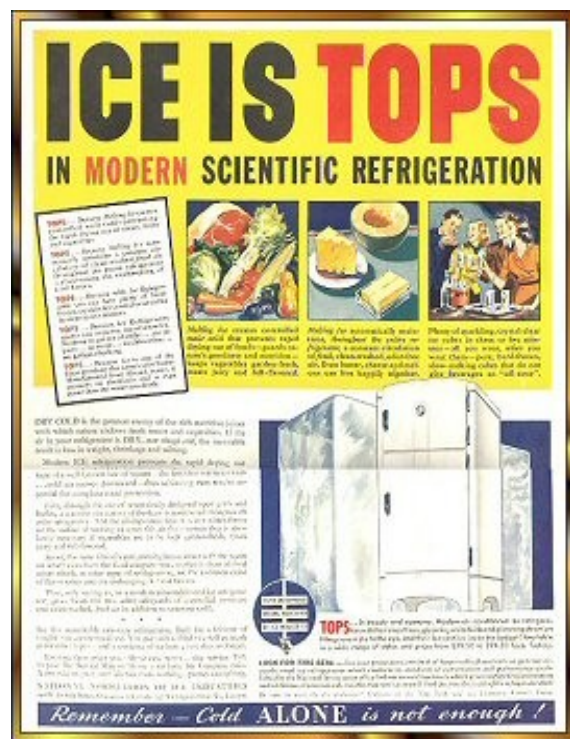
On radio, I come across 2 radio programs sponsored by **Avalon Cigarettes**. The first was **SHOW BOAT**, which returned to the air on NBC's **Red Network** after a short absence. The second program was appropriately called **AVALON TIME**, also on **NBC(Red)**. This variety program was famous for being the first radio program to star Red Skelton.

Now that we're in a new millennium, it may sound a little strange that **Ice** was a

radio sponsor. Yes, it's the same stuff we enjoy in cooling lemonade on a hot day, and swear at when we slip on it during the wintertime. When radio's golden age was at its peak, **Ice** was very important for refrigeration. If you "**New Generation Old Time Radio Fans**" ever wondered where the term "**Ice Box**" came from, it was a refrigerator that had a special area where a large (and usually heavy) block of ice was placed. The **Ice** cooled the food inside the refrigerator. When it was time for a new block, housewives across the United States were anxiously "**Waiting for the Ice Man to cometh.**" When he did come, the Ice Man, with the size and strength of Hulk Hogan, brought a large block of **Ice** with his trusty ice tongs and placed it into the **Ice Box**.

Even during the 1930's, **Ice** and the **Ice Box** were in a competitive battle with the new electric refrigerators that were becoming popular. What gave them a fighting chance was this competition originally took place during "**The Great Depression**"--- and it did cost a sizable amount of money (by 1930's standards) to buy an electric refrigerator. The commercial implied that food kept in an **Ice Box** stayed fresh days longer because of the consistency of keeping the right amount of moisture and cold. Its famous line on the air was "**Cold ALONE is not enough.**"

If you're wondering, **Ice** (under the name of the **National Ice Headquarters**) sponsored **PARTIES AT PICKFAIR**, a program that featured celebrities, talk, and music at the home of actress Mary Pickford. This program was heard on the **Columbia Network** from 1935-1936. **Ice** also sponsored **NBC(Red's) HOMEMAKERS' EXCHANGE** from 1937-1938. It was a daytime program of cooking and



household hints hosted by Eleanor Howe.

The following sponsor wasn't well known because it was only sold in a 2 state region (California and Arizona to be exact). Before unleaded gasoline became a reality, petroleum companies had interesting and colorful nicknames for the gasoline they sold. A motorist heard of *(Texaco) Fire Chief*, *(Atlantic) Imperial*, *(Mobilgas) Special*, *(Chevron) Supreme*, *Good Gulf*, and *(Esso) Extra*, to name just a few. Believe it or not, there was a gasoline that was "**Cracked.**" Now let's examine this for a moment. Cracks have the reputation of being rather unpleasant. For example, a person with butterfingers was inclined to drop something on a piece of valuable china. The end result was a crack for their trouble. As a rule, cracked china, no matter how valuable they were before being cracked, ended up in the trash. With this thought, could "**Cracked Gasoline**" be beneficial for the typical motorist? On paper, it sounds like a person was a little cracked to buy and use this gasoline, but in real life, he/she definitely had all his/her marbles intact. The gasoline, *Rio Grande Cracked*, was the performance fuel that more police and fire vehicles in California and Arizona used than any other brand. The announcer stated if professional vehicles got quality performance with *Cracked Gasoline*, imagine what it could do with everyday cars and trucks that weren't used as vigorously and constantly.

Rio Grande Cracked Gasoline and *Rio Grande* stations in California and Arizona were the sponsors of *CALLING ALL CARS*, a popular police drama program heard on the west coast stations of the **Columbia Network**.



We conclude this article with *Glim*, a dishwashing liquid made by the makers of *Bab-O Cleanser*. If this product wasn't the very first dishwashing liquid on the market, it was one of the first. If anyone saw *Glim* on their dealer's shelves for the first time, he/she might think the people of *B.T. Babbitt, Inc.* (who made *Bab-O* and *Glim*) were a little cracked--- and I don't mean the gasoline! The reason for this thought was *Glim's* unusual packaging. The bottle that contained the liquid was placed upside down inside its metal holder (don't ask me why they did this). Once the *Glim* was purchased and taken home, the user removed the bottle and placed it right side up in the metal holder. Now the weird stuff was out of the way, using *Glim* for dishwashing was a pleasant and faster alternative to soaps in bar or powdered form. Whether the water was soft or hard enough to eat, *Glim* washed the dishes clean and quickly with equal consistency.

Since *Bab-O* was a nationally known brand of cleanser, *Glim* helped its fellow *Babbitt* brother co-sponsor *DAVID HARUM* (CBS and later NBC), *LORA LAWTON* (NBC), and *NONA FROM NOWHERE* (CBS) from 1949-1950.

I have a large list of little known radio sponsors, but I think it's wise to put an end to this particular article. In Part II of this series, we'll take a look at more of the little known products that shared the airwaves with the established brands.