



# The Old Radio Times

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## THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE: CHARACTER COUNTS

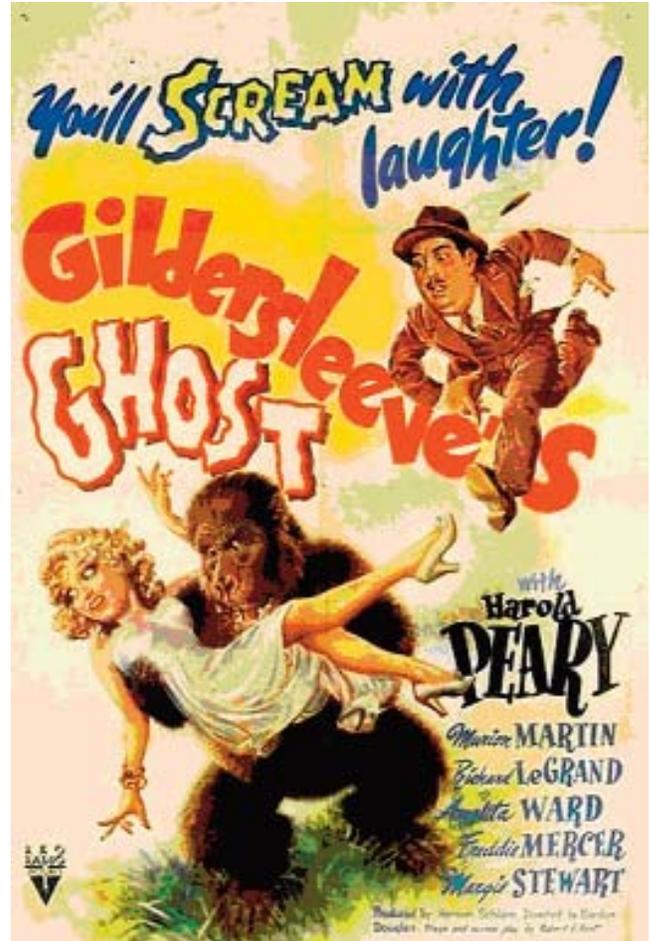
By Elizabeth McLeod

*The following article is presented in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the radio premiere of The Great Gildersleeve on August 31st.*

There were two types of comedy competing for listener attention during the Golden Age of Radio - vaudeville comedy and character comedy - and most comedy performers on the air could be placed firmly into one camp or the other. A few performers straddled both - Jack Benny comes immediately to mind - but it was very rare for a radio character to move from one style to another. One who did, and with outstanding success, was Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve.

Today, The Great Gildersleeve is one of the most fondly remembered of radio's comedic figures - an earnest, well-meaning fellow who often found himself the unfortunate victim of his own pomposity. As delineated by Harold Peary and Willard Waterman over the program's seventeen-year run, Gildy emerged as a figure of great depth. This was a testament not just to the actors who played the part, but also to the writers who gave him words, and to the supporting cast who gave him a believable, textured setting.

Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve hadn't always been such a well-rounded personality. When he first appeared on the scene in the late 1930's, he was merely one in a long parade of exaggerated comic types to emerge from the typewriter



*Editor's note: I have one of these posters. Willard Waterman signed it when he was at the Cincinnati convention. I have the pen he used.*

of the vaudeville-influenced former cartoonist Don Quinn.

Quinn, the creator of Fibber McGee and Molly, for his broadly-comic characters - not the least of whom were Fibber and Molly themselves, who started out in the mid-thirties as caricatures familiar to anyone who'd ever seen a small-time husband-and-wife act cavorting on the stage. The broadness of the personalities wore away over time, however, leaving room for Quinn to sur-

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round them with an array of wildly exaggerated comic-strip-style supporting characters, portrayed by such veterans of Chicago radio as Bill Thompson, Hugh Studebaker...and Harold Peary.

Peary's natural voice – rich, mellow, and musical – lent itself best to a certain type of characterization. Although he had had some success on the air as a romantic leading man/crooner type before joining Quinn's troupe, his speaking voice seemed best suited to the portrayal of authority figures – and given Fibber McGee's impudent abrasiveness, the more pompous the authority figure the better. Peary began playing these types during Marian Jordan's absence from the McGee program in 1938 when Fibber was in desperate need of a strong foil. By 1939, these random blowhards began to coalesce into a single personality. His first name might be Wilbur in one episode. or George in another, and his relationship to Fibber might be that of a banker, a doctor, a



dentist, or an old classmate -- but the last name would always be the most pompous name Quinn could bring to mind: Gildersleeve.

By 1940, Gildersleeve became a Character as opposed to a mere "character." He gained the permanent name of "Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve", he became Fibber's friendly-enemy next-door, and he assumed a position in the community as the manager of the Gildersleeve Girdle Works. He became so popular with listeners that, in the summer of 1941, he gained his own program.

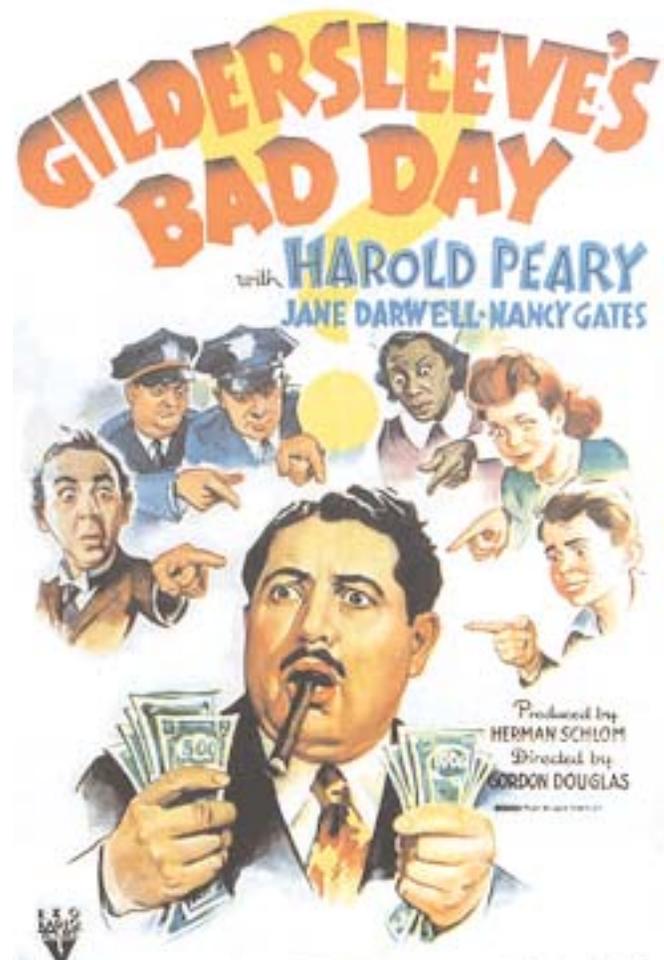
Don Quinn didn't have the time or the energy to write the new series, so the job was turned over to Leonard L. Levinson, a very different sort of writer. Levinson's sense of humor was far, far subtler than the falling-closet gaggery favored by Quinn, and it was his style that would define The Great Gildersleeve for its entire run. He established Gildy as a tenderhearted soul behind his bluster -- a responsible foster parent to his orphaned niece Marjorie and nephew Leroy, a benevolent employer to his maid Birdie, and a loyal friend to his associates in his new hometown of Summerfield. When Levinson entered the service in 1942, he was replaced by the team of John Whedon and Sam Moore, who would carry Gildersleeve even further down that road, creating perhaps the finest pure character comedy of the 1940's.

Whedon and Moore fleshed out the town of Summerfield, turning it into a vivid, realistic image of wartime small-town America. Gildy's friend and sparring partner Judge Hooker, and his off-again on-again girlfriend Leila Ransom, would soon be joined by Peavey the druggist, Floyd the Barber, Police Chief Gates, Bessie the scatterbrained secretary, bumbling Mayor Terwilliger, combative Mr. Bullard from next

door, demanding Aunt Hattie, and many other figures with their own subtle comic quirks, but all essentially real people who responded to the week's situation in an honestly human manner. Within this setting, Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve himself became more and more real, more serious-minded, more sympathetic. The bluster and the pomposity became occasional, lovable personality quirks rather than the defining traits of the character. Fibber McGee, Wistful Vista, and childish pranks across the backyard fence faded quickly into the past.

Adding to this sense of realism was Whedon and Moore's effective use of serialization. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll had proven the effectiveness of serio-comic serialization on radio as far back as the 1920's, but the technique had been eclipsed since the late 1930's by the rise of wisecracking Broadway and film comedians on the air, comics where - above all else - the gag was the thing. Perhaps more than any other program of the 1940's, *The Great Gildersleeve* hearkened back to the gentler, more contemplative humor of the early *Amos 'n' Andy*, with its seamless week-to-week continuity during the mid-1940's. Listeners heard Gildy's romance with Mrs. Ransom blossom, flower, wilt, and fade - only to sprout again. Listeners followed with increasing interest Gildy's campaign for mayor, the rise and fall of his new romances with school principal Eve Goodwin and the exotic Dolores Del Ray -- the latter of which led to that favorite *Amos 'n' Andy* technique, a breach - of - promise suit -- and the growing pains of Marjorie and Leroy.

And as these story lines unfolded, episode by episode, the town of Summerfield itself came to life. Listeners could easily visualize its streets and neighborhoods, the homey surroundings of Peavey's Pharmacy and Floyd's barber and the



hall where Gildy's club, the Jolly Boys, met to sing harmony around the piano, the cramped little office at the Water Department where Gildy tried to maintain decorum, the reservoir up in the hills where grouchy old Charlie stood guard. The town became an idealized window into how America viewed itself during the 1940's -- and echoes of that warm, friendly community would be heard well into the 1960's, when John Whedon played a key role in developing another idealized small town, Andy Griffith's *Mayberry*.

Character comedy is very difficult to do well. Any competent writer can string together jokes from a file or come up with outlandish comic situations, and any competent actor can get laughs reading such material. But to truly bring characters to life - to point up the humor in their



experiences without turning them into caricatures, and to keep them sympathetic without descending into pathos - required the sort of highly-refined writing and acting talent that became increasingly scarce as radio grew. With dozens of different programs consuming material by the carload, it became very easy for the mediocre and the trite to not only find a place on the air, but to thrive.

But those programs, by and large, however long they may have lasted, aren't remembered today. They didn't create enduring images in the minds of the audience, and they couldn't transcend the loss of a writer or a star the way *The Great Gildersleeve* did. Whedon and Moore left the series in late 1947, but the setting they established was so vivid, the characterizations so clearly defined, that other writers were able to fall right into line and continue the program without a hitch. When Harold Peary left the series in 1950, his old Chicago colleague, and sound-alike, Willard Waterman replaced him without missing a beat. Gildy remained Gildy - because listeners knew him. They knew who he was, what he believed, what he might do in any given

situation. His voice might sound a little different, but that could happen to anyone. He was still the water commissioner with a precocious nephew, a wholesome niece, an understanding house-keeper, a stable of girlfriends, and the same old neighborhood pals. Summerfield was still, and always, the town everybody remembered. "What a character!" was young Leroy's favorite exclamation when he caught his uncle in some wild escapade. But, it could just as easily be an exclamation of praise and recognition - for Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve was, indeed, one of radio's great characters. ■



(Reprinted from *Radio Collectors of America* newsletter)

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Mystery Baby

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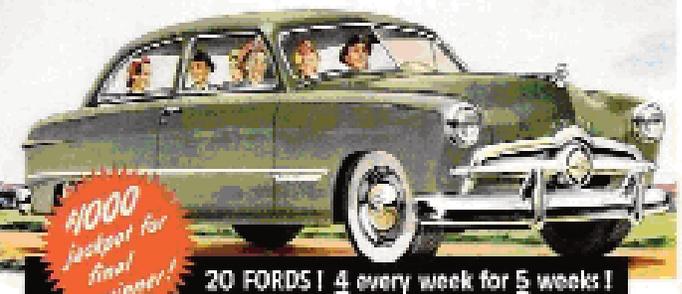
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Help! Send a winning name for this baby girl - and I'll put a new Ford in your future!



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6. The name must be a name that is not a name of a person.
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8. The name must be a name that is not a name of a color.
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Eye on ebay: Women of radio or Babes in Broadcasting by Doug Hopkinson

Welcome to another edition of Eye on eBay. When we listen to a radio program, we see visions in our heads of the actors. We imagine how they look unless of course we already know. Personally, I concentrate more on feminine than on masculine. That's just how I roll. So I thought it would be fun to flip through the giant photo album that is eBay and see if any female faces match my imagination

First up is a trio of young lovelies from the 1930s program Clara, Lu and Em.

Not quite what I imagined. Nice hats though. At only \$650 plus the very tacky 5 dollar shipping these three women could be adorning a

wall in your family room or possibly a back hall closet. Either way, what a marvelous photo from a popular program.



Clara, Lu & Em Autographed Picture 1931

Price: US \$650.00 Buy It Now Add to cart

Shipping \$5.00 standard shipping

Next we have a photo of Richard Diamond's girlfriend Helen. What man doesn't want to snuggle up to her after a long day's work solving cases? Here she is, Virginia Gregg.



Helen is looking every bit as 1940s sexy as she sounds on radio. The seller has a very odd price on this photo but the shipping is reasonable.

### 1949 Press Photo Virginia Gregg in "Richard Diamond Private Detective"

Price: **US \$25.44**

[Buy It Now](#)

[Add to cart](#)

Shipping **\$2.99** standard shipping



While we are in detective mode, how about Sam Spade's secretary Effie? Hot stuff? Let's see. Lurene Tuttle has nothing to be looking so sad about. She aged rather well. The next picture is her about 10 years previous.

### LURENE TUTTLE orginial movie photo 1947

Price: **US \$25.00**

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Definitely hot! \$25.00 a photo is not bad for original photos. I might shop around a bit for copies of these at one fifth the price.

### LURENE TUTTLE orginial movie photo 1930s

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Did you ever wonder about the gossip girls Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons? Here is Hedda. Who knew? She doesn't match up for me. It looks like she has bed-head in this shot. That's not necessarily a bad thing. \$34.88 is not only a strange price, it's too much for an 8x10. Pass it up.



### 1942 HEDDA HOPPER - Columnist/Dead Hedda Press Photo

Price: **US \$34.88**

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Shipping **\$3.50** standard shipping

Here is Louella. Another non-match for me. I always thought she sounded like a young Lucille Ball. \$13.90 is another weird price. Kinda on the high side. \$8.00 shipping is ridiculous. Pass.



### LOUELLA PARSONS - Original Agency Photo

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Shipping **\$8.00** standard shipping

Let's move along to our next item. This would be the famous duo, Myrt and Marge. This was a very popular program that had a lot of drama on the show as well as behind the scenes. I won't get into that story here but it is very interesting and I recommend looking them up. The show was written by Myrtle Vail who also starred as Myrt. Her co-star was Donna Damerel who played Marge. Damerel was Myrtle Vail's real life daughter.



### Photo Myrtle Vail, Donna Damarel "Myrt and Marge"

Price: **US \$15.00** [Buy It Now](#)  
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Shipping **\$4.00** standard shipping

On the radio program they played a couple of show girls just like in the other picture. In the picture below they are dressed in the height of conservative fashion for the time. I can't say they match my imagination but they do now. I like both of these pictures!



### Myrtle Vail, Donna Damarel "Myrt and Marge" Still Photo

Price: **US \$14.99** [Buy It Now](#)  
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Shipping **Free** standard shipping



Our next actress portrayed Corliss Archer on the radio program *Meet Corliss Archer*. Here is Janet Waldo. Janet is the one on the left. She is just as pretty and perky as her voice. Over the years her voice didn't

change. If you close your eyes and listen to Corliss you will also hear Judy Jetson, Penelope Pitstop and Josie from *Josie and the Pussycats*. All cartoons this author grew up watching. A bit pricey but this is a great picture. Buy it. Now!

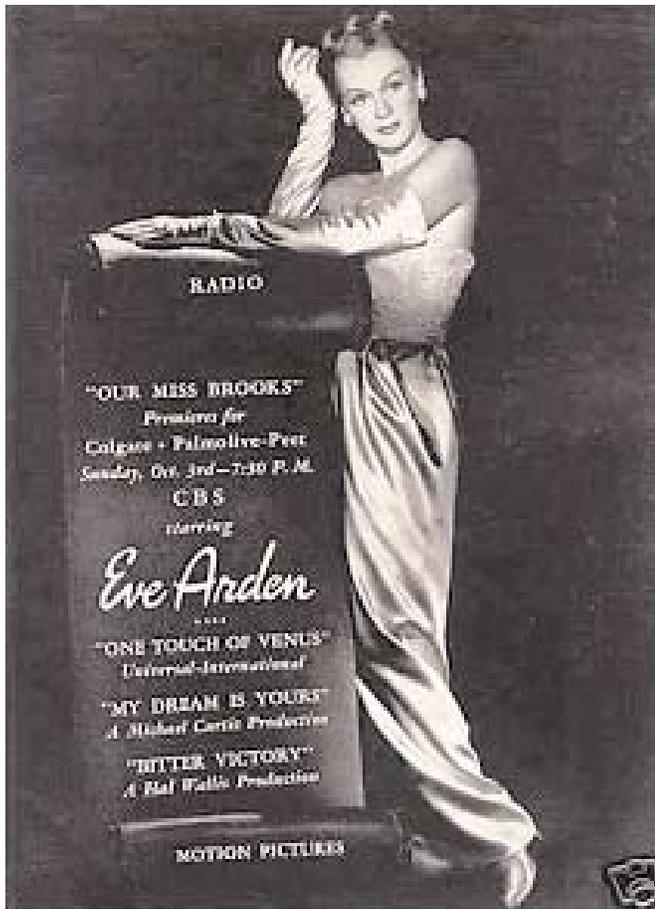
### BS PHOTO agn-721 Janet Waldo Actress "Corlis Archer"

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I already knew who Eve Arden was before I heard *Our Miss Brooks* but I must say, she never looked so glam in my imagination! For 20 bucks delivered this would make a great framed keepsake for the discerning *Our Miss Brooks* devotee.

### '48 RARE CBS RADIO EVE ARDEN "OUR MISS BROOKS" AD

Price: **US \$16.99**

[Buy It Now](#)

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Shipping **\$3.01** standard shipping

The next actress we have is Anne Elstner who portrayed Stella Dallas on the 15 minute soap of the same name for 18 years. Here is a picture of Anne. Pictured here with Curtis Arnall (aka Pepper Young), I can't say she matches in my mind. She is certainly not Barbara Stanwyck who was Stella Dallas in the movie which spawned the radio program but she maintained the role for 18 years while Stanwyck was only at it for 106 minutes.



### JJ360 Photo ANNE ELSTNER, CURTIS ARNALL "Stella Dalles"

Price: **US \$15.00**

[Buy It Now](#)

[Add to cart](#)

Shipping **\$4.00** economy shipping

Did you ever wonder what Ma Perkins looked like? Check this picture below out.



## 1936 Photo of Radio Star Ma Perkins

Price: **US \$8.95**

[Buy It Now](#)

[Add to cart](#)

Shipping **\$3.11** standard shipping



Looks exactly like I thought! Whether this is Virginia Payne in disguise is unknown but it is the picture that was sent out as a premium to listen-

ers of the program in 1936. Virginia Payne portrayed Ma Perkins from 1933 to 1960. She never missed a performance in those 27 years.

Below is another picture that is verified as Virginia Payne in 1957. The portrait above of Virginia is from 1934 as Ma Perkins.



## 1857 Press Photo Virginia Payne. "Ma Perkins" CBS Radio

Price: **US \$27.88**

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Shipping **\$2.99** standard shipping

I think I'll take the 1934 model! Yowsa! There is no way that 1936 picture is Virginia Payne. Well, that's all we have time for in this edition of Eye on eBay. Look for a new article next time!

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# Have You "Radio Ear"?

By Charles Magee Adams

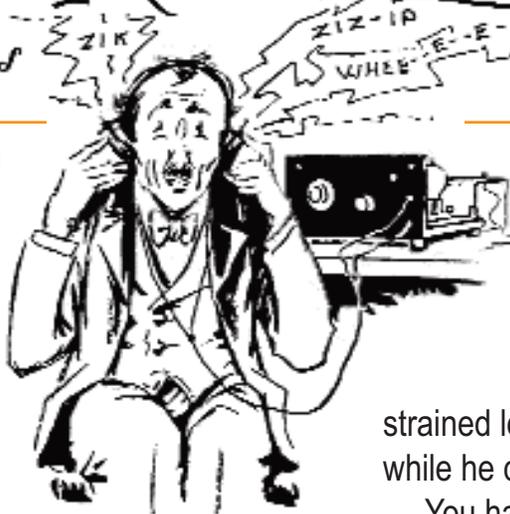


HAVE you "radio ear"? It will do you no good to stall uneasily or register an indignant protest, for, if you read this magazine, the odds are a thousand to one that you have. Besides, though you have, there is no reason to be uneasy or indignant about it.

"Radio ear" is not something to be confused with "cauliflower ear," the professional badge so popular before prize-fighting became boxing. Certain cynics, of course, will retort that it must then be a disease, to judge by the program choices of some of their acquaintances. But, despite the evidence to support that 'wisecrack, "radio ear" is not a disease either, like "housemaid's knee," "writer's cramp" or "stone-cutter's asthma." It is nothing more than a normal and natural psychological adjustment.

In other words, one who has "radio ear" has become accustomed to listening to radio. That sounds quite simple and obvious, doesn't it? But, like so many simple and obvious things in this hectic world, it goes considerably deeper and farther, and explains more things than it might seem at first glance.

For instance, the very fact that one must become accustomed to listening to radio is something to think over. On the face of things, that shouldn't be necessary. Apparently all one needs to do is throw the switch, cock an attentive ear and let the dynamic do the rest. But not so.



*You felt the same strain when you got your first earful o radio.*

To prove that, get hold of some one never heard a radio (if that can be done), sit him down before your loud-speaker, and watch a

strained look come over his face while he does his first listening.

You have doubtless forgotten, since it happened so long ago, but you felt that same strain when you had your first earful of radio, and for good reason.

Until you become accustomed to it, listening to radio does involve a certain amount of strain, because broadcasting is more or less artificial. And that is no heresy to modern tone-quality perfection, either.

Even with the best of transmission and reproduction, broadcasting is certain to be more or less artificial. A master oil portrait never quite equals the living subject. A movie newsreel is never just as realistic as the big event itself. Whenever you copy or transfer, there is certain to be a loss. That is a law of nature, and radio is not exempt from its operation.

With any good, modern receiver picking up high-grade, modern transmission, this loss of fidelity is astonishingly small. Yet it is there. Listening to the radio version is not quite like hearing the same artists or speakers in person. Hence the necessity to become accustomed to the difference, which can be called "radio ear," just as the film addict comes to acquire what

might be called "movie eye." This business of being accustomed explains, among other things, why musicians in the main are such poor judges of radio tone quality. Here is a paradox which has puzzled and surprised many listeners for a long time.

Seemingly, trained musicians should be ideal judges of tone. But experience-and some of it quite dear for the manufacturers-has shown that most of them are not. The answer is that they simply do not have "radio ear."

Even though they do spend leisure time listening to radio, their working-hours are devoted to listening to music in person. So, the unconscious adjustment which radio requires is doubly difficult for them. as compared with the average lay listener who attends a concert or opera only now and then, and gets most of his music through a loud-speaker.

Besides, when they do become more or less accustomed to broadcasting, their musical training still predominates over their later-acquired radio habits. This is illustrated rather strikingly by two friends of mine.

He is a veteran dial-twister, and she a singer of ability. Her cultivated sense of pitch is offended grievously by slight flattening or sharpening which he does not so much as notice. But she is serenely oblivious to heterodyne howls which drive him to distraction. In other words, he has a well-developed case of "radio ear," whereas her ear is still that of the musician.



Further, being accustomed seems to be the best practical explanation of the everlasting clash of opinion among listeners over tone quality. "One man's meat is

another man's poison" fits the case rather neatly. A receiver whose tone sends its owner into ecstasy may be unbearable to his friend, called in, more than likely, to admire it. Precise laboratory tests may show beyond doubt that the receiver in question delivers reproduction much superior in fidelity to that of the dissatisfied friend's. But that makes no difference.

He has become accustomed to his set. Therefore, that is what his "radio ear" considers good. In time he may be won over to something different and better. But it takes time.

For instance, another friend of mine is clinging stoutly to a six-year-old receiver. This friend contends his venerable outfit is superior to anything being produced to-day, and will stick to it until no more replacement parts can be bought to keep it going. He has a case of "radio ear" for that particular set.

"Radio ear" likewise has much to do with causing listeners to become accustomed to the acoustics of their own homes. If two friends have identical receivers, each is pretty sure to think his better than the other's, and not simply because of pride in ownership. His set sounds better to him because he is used to the acoustic properties of his own domicile. Several things tend to affect these properties.

Plentiful draperies, heavily upholstered furniture and thick rugs damp out the high tones, thereby emphasizing the bass. On the other hand, scanty

*Contentends that his venerable outfit is superior to any produced to-day.*



damping of this sort, together with large rooms and bare walls, emphasizes the high notes, giving the effect of reduced bass.

This explains why a shift in the location of the receiver or a change in the character of the furnishings often causes a marked difference in the tone of a radio; that is, to the owner's "radio ear".

These are some of the more common symptoms of "radio ear." Another, found particularly among victims of the DX bug, is the ability to enjoy a program despite clamoring interference.

The sure-enough distance fan can sit, blissfully entranced, through a barrage of static and electrical noise and a chorus of heterodyne whines and blooper cat-calls that would be hopeless bedlam to the listener whose usual fare is the program of some local station. Unless all this interference utterly submerges the coveted far-away station, his "radio ear" simply filters out the din.

However, for those who have not trained themselves to this particular stage of perfection, yet who recognize other symptoms of "radio ear" in their condition, here are some convenient and interesting tests which they can apply to determine just how highly developed their cases are. Can you distinguish Graham McNamee's voice from that of John S. Young when these announcers work in NBC programs?

Can you distinguish the oboe from the flute in an orchestra, the lower tones of the clarinet from the bassoon, and the higher tones of the cello from the lower notes of the viola?

Does your ear detect the difference between static and trolley-car interference, between heterodynes and the squeals of regenerative receivers?

Can you pick out the two other parts besides

"Matt Thompkins" which George Frame Brown plays in Real Folks Sketches?

If your "radio ear" can score 100 in these progressive tests, you are ready to give its mettle a real trial – namely, distinguish Rudy Vallee from Will Osborne, either speaking or singing.

If you can do that, your "radio ear" becomes a candidate for the ultimate test of telling whether any random blues singer is male or female, and if it can-but it won't. After all, there are limits to the accomplishments of us proud humans. Vallee or Osborne? ■



*This article came from "WHAT'S ON THE AIR", the magazine for the radio listener. Volume 1 August, 1930 No.10*

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Finally his hard work and persistence paid off; he was brought to New York City by the Hearst syndicate to create a new daily strip for their newspaper chain syndicate, King Features, Inc. The new strip was called *Thimble Theater* and it debuted December 27, 1919. Initially it dealt with melodramatic theater features and jokes, but Segar soon scrapped the format and introduced new characters: Olive Oyl, her brother Castor Oyl, and her hapless boy friend, Ham Gravy.

While this strip was running well, Segar then created a second one, also a daily strip, *The Five Fifteen*, which was about folks on a commuter train. Its central figures were John Sappo and his nagging wife, Myrtle (named after Segar's spouse.) Both strips remained popular with readers and a Sunday color edition of *Thimble Theater* was added in April 1925.

By this time, Segar had an established career and he and his wife took his art board to Santa Monica, CA to take up residence. He had been a sickly fellow for some time, with liver problems, and the move may have been related to seeking a healthier climate. Also in the realm of conjecture is that living near the sandy beaches and exhilarating surf of Santa Monica inspired Segar to finally create for *Thimble Theater* a sea-going hero who would dominate the strip. Popeye made his first appearance on January 17, 1929, a full ten years after the strip's origin. The character was an instant hit with the public and King Features were soon swamped with requests from newspapers around the country for local publication rights.

Popeye's popular acclaim soon carried him into the next venue in the 1930s: the world of animated cartoon shorts. At that time, the big three supplying cartoons to movie theaters were: Disney (with Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck,

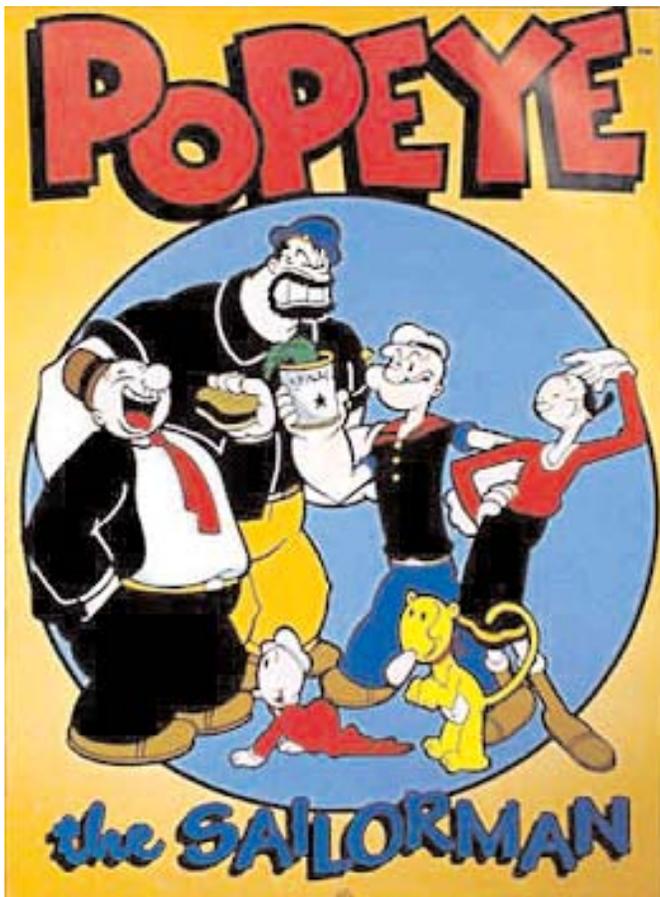


Goofy, etc.), Warner Brothers (with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd, etc.) and Fleischer Studios (with Betty Boop.) Unlike their two west coast competitors, Max and David Fleischer had their production facilities in New York.

Needing a popular character for their shorts, they bought the rights to Popeye from King Features on November 17, 1932. By the summer of 1933, Popeye debuted in his first Fleischer cartoon and it was well received. That studio would go on to produce 108 Popeye animated shorts from 1933 to 1941, all but three of them were in black and white.

Several New York performers voiced the various characters over the years. William Costello was the first one to be the salty hero and was replaced by Jack Mercer. Mae Questel, and later Margie Hines (Mercer's wife) portrayed Olive Oyl while William Pennell and Gus Wickie did Bluto. All of the cartoons had plenty of music supplied by Victor Irwin's Cartoonland Band.

As might be expected, there was cross-fertilization between the comic strip and the animated cartoons. Bluto was a minor and infrequent character in the strip but the Fleisch-



ers had him featured in almost every cartoon. Segar originally drew Popeye getting his super strength by rubbing the Whiffle Hen, but in the animated shorts he obtained his muscular power by eating spinach. So later, opening a can of spinach became part of the comic strip too.

By 1938, five years after his debut on the screen, Popeye had knocked off Mickey Mouse as the most popular animated cartoon character. But his creator did not live to enjoy this fame; Segar died at age 43 of leukemia and liver failure on October 13, 1938. Of course, no successful comic strip ever dies with its originator, and the adventures of Popeye, drawn by a succession of different artists, continues to the present day.

Popeye came to radio on NBC on September 10, 1935 and was sponsored by Wheatena cereal. As one might expect, the first thing jetti-

soned on the program was spinach, the source of Popeye's amazing strength. On the radio program, the salty mariner obtained his power from Wheatena, and he even sang its praises in the commercials:

"Wheatena's me diet,  
I ax ya to try it.  
I'm Popeye the Sailor Man.  
(Beep-beep)"

The identity of the program's director, and who did the casting, has not yet been uncovered, but it's apparent that local radio performers were ignored and the search concentrated primarily among stage actors.

Detmar Henry Poppen (1879-1955) became the first man to voice Popeye on radio. Poppen, a native of Rochester, NY, spent a lifetime in show-biz, mostly on the musical stage. He appeared in nearly two dozen Broadway plays, from 1906 to 1943, six of which were Schubert Brothers productions. This singer/actor specialized in light opera and many of his stage credits were in productions based upon either the music of Sigmund Romberg or Victor Herbert, including his last documented musical in 1945, *The Student Prince*. Poppen was not limited to the New York area; there were appearances in stock companies on the west coast and a few movie credits. He had virtually no radio experience, except for some comedy roles on *Bobby Benson* and *the H- Bar-O Rangers* on CBS.

The woman playing his girl friend at the microphone shared her first name; Olive Lamoy was the voice of Olive Oyl. Lamoy had almost no radio experience before Popeye, although in the summer of 1935 she shared a 15 minute radio program with Bob Fran in which they both sang.

But basically she was a stage singer and dancer, albeit not on Broadway. In 1928 she appeared twice at the Warburton Theatre in Yonkers, NY, first in *Stella Dallas* and then in *The Noose*; she was reviewed as being a fine singer and dancer in the latter. Lamoy also was in the cast of other off-Broadway shows in Brooklyn from 1928 to 1932; contemporary records describe her as “young, pretty, and blonde.”

The third major character on the Popeye radio show was another stage actor with hardly any radio experience. J. Wellington Wimpy was voiced by Charlie Lawrence (1896-1984) who had began as a child actor in the Broadway play, *Ben Hur*, in 1907. Over the next 35 years Lawrence was in 27 Broadway plays, many of them musicals, and virtually all of them had very short runs. *Helen of Troy* (1923) had 191 performances and *Sing Out the News* (1938) managed to last for 105 nights. But the vast majority of Lawrence’s stage roles, whether comedy or drama, had very short runs. *Keep ‘Em Laughing* (1942) was open a month, *The Eldest* (1935) closed after 24 performances, *One Thing After Another* (1937) went a month, *Portrait of Gilbert* (1934) logged only three performances, and *Mystery Moon* (1930) closed the day after it opened. It seems a pity Lawrence did not do more radio work; he certainly would have found it more durable.

Strangely enough, the youngest member of Popeye’s cast had the most radio experience, and he played a character that wasn’t in Segar’s strip. Since Swee’pea was too young to contribute any meaningful dialogue, a new youngster was invented for the radio program. Matey, the newsboy, was Popeye’s ward and he was portrayed by nine year old Jimmy Donnelly. He and Janice Gilbert, two years older, were fre-

quently paired on network radio. They played the orphans on *Hilltop House*, the Collins kids on *The O’Neils*, and two other children on *Second Husband*. Jimmy also had roles on *Death Valley Days* and *Showboat*.

The announcer on the series was Kevin Keech and he also sang the show’s theme song. This 15 minute program was broadcast Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 7:15 pm from September 1935 to March 1936 for a total of 87 episodes, only a few of which have survived. The radio series used some of the plots from the strip and some from the cartoons, all of which were fairly simplistic. A few of the stories, including some of the existing audio copies, involved adaptations of fairy tales, usually with Popeye saving Olive or Wimpy from danger. When the character of Bluto was in the script, Jackson Beck, a seasoned radio veteran, played the gruff villain.

When Popeye returned to the airwaves on August 31, 1936 after a long hiatus, it was on a different network (CBS) and had a different actor in the title lead. Floyd Buckley (1877-1956) had replaced Poppen as the voice of Popeye so Poppen went back to the musical stage. CBS aired this quarter-hour program

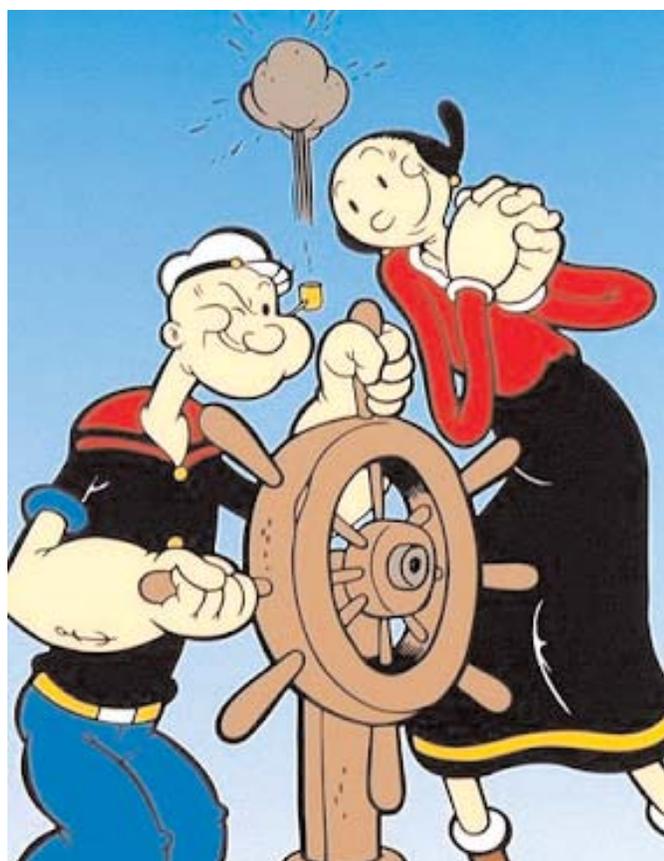


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Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7:15 pm. Although Buckley did have more radio experience than the man he replaced, he also had plenty of stage work on his resume.

Like those of many show-biz folks, some of his accomplishments can be documented, while other claims may be challenged by a raised eyebrow. He was born in Chatham, NY and got to the stage fairly early, in vaudeville and with some small stock companies. During a 1954 interview with his hometown paper when he was 77, Buckley told an engaging tale of being stranded in British Columbia when the company manager absconded with their money. The other actors gave up, but Buckley, broke and hungry, tracked the thief over 1,000 miles across Canada in sub-zero weather, and finally caught his prey in Alberta Province. Apparently, Buckley, like the Mounties, always got his man.

In that same interview, Buckley also stated



that he gave up the stage briefly and went to Georgia where he managed a lumber company. However, in the 1910 census he listed his occupation there merely as “lumberman at sawmill.” He lived in Georgia with his wife, Lillian May Ward, whom he had married in 1905. She was an athletic native of Texas and rode horses well so they ended up in Hollywood where both would find jobs working on silent pictures. She became a stunt woman and performed fearlessly on horses, in an automobile, and even crashing one train into another. In his 1954 interview, Buckley claimed he was Pearl White’s stunt double, but it was actually his wife that performed in that capacity.

The couple divorced around 1923 and he headed east while Lillian remained in Hollywood where she got her pilot’s license and soon was performing aerial stunts. Meanwhile Buckley married his second wife, Juliet, and thereafter wrote Lillian out of his standard biography. In New York he turned to radio and found employment on *Cavalcade of America*, *Snow Village*, *Roses & Drums*, and the *Columbia Workshop*. I haven’t found any documentation to support his claim that he played Daddy Warbucks on *Little Orphan Annie*, but he may have. When Popeye was cancelled on February 26, 1937 (Wheatena decided that paying King Features \$ 1200 a week for Popeye rights was too expensive) Buckley stayed on in radio, being cast in *American School of the Air*, *The Sportsmen Club*, and *Quiet Please*.

In 1938 Popeye was brought back to network radio, this time sponsored by the makers of Popsicles. The program had a short run, from May 2, 1938 to June 29, 1938, and I’ve been unable to determine if it had the same cast. Totalling the three different series, approximately 200 live performances aired. About a

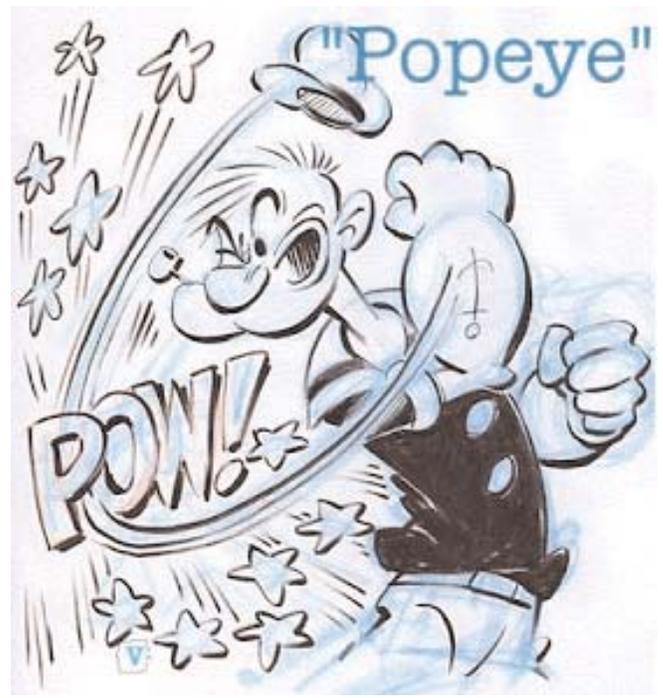
dozen audio copies are in circulation now, with another handful in private hands.

All three Popeye series were produced by Frank and Anne Hummert, who are known for their domination of the soap opera sector of radio. But the Hummerts were also successful with juvenile adventure shows, albeit in a much smaller number. They produced some long running and well-known juveniles series, including *Little Orphan Annie*, *Jack Armstrong*, and *Terry and the Pirates*.

Obviously *Popeye* was one of the few kids' shows the Hummerts produced that had such a short run on network radio. But as Jim Cox pointed out, having Popeye rely on Wheatena instead of spinach, "was one of broadcasting's earliest instances of working the client's message into the story line, a precedent that others shamelessly copied."

Although the radio version ended in July 1938, Popeye continued to be as popular as ever in the animated shorts. Paramount Studios, who owned Fleischer Studios, closed down the operation and turned the Popeye franchise over to another subsidiary, Famous Studios. That company would go on to produce another 125 shorts, virtually all in color. In a patriotic gesture in WW II, they changed Popeye's attire, which Segar had designed in 1929, to an all white one, resembling the U. S. Navy uniform.

The voices of the characters changed somewhat; Harry Foster Welch (1893-1973) took over as Popeye when Jack Mercer was drafted. Margie Hines was Olive and Pinto Colvig (who was doing Goofy for Disney) portrayed Bluto. Welch was probably the only actor to voice Popeye who was authorized to portray as Popeye in personal appearances. *Time* magazine reported that in October 1940 Welch showed up as Popeye in the office of the Chief



of Naval Operations to present a self-portrait, which was to be used as an official insignia for a squadron of Navy bombers.

For this fictional nautical character, there is apparently no end. Over 700 commercial products have borne his name or likeness over the years. Two U. S. cities (Crystal City, TX and Alma, AR) continue to fight over which can claim the legitimate title of "Spinach Capital of the U.S." and both municipalities display Popeye's likeness prominently. In 1995 the U. S. Postal Service issued a Popeye postage stamp. For Popeye's 75th Anniversary, the Empire State Building was lit up with green lights (for spinach) over the weekend of January 16-18, 2004.

But the greatest ongoing tribute to this famous sailor can be found in Segar's hometown of Chester, IL. The county seat of Randolph County, this town of less than 9,000 has been holding annually a "Popeye Picnic" for over thirty years. In 2013 it will be held again on the weekend following Labor Day and tourists will flock there. There they will enjoy: Popeye's Mu-

seum, Castor Oyl's Carnival Rides, the Popeye Parade, Swee'pea's Petting Zoo, Poopdeck Pappy's Magic, and the Popeye 5K Race. They can also stroll around the city, viewing the life-size statues of Popeye, Olive Oyl, Swee'pea, Wimpy, Jeep, Bluto, Castor Oyl, the Whiffle Hen, and the Sea Hag.

As a historical footnote (and Segar would have known this) castor oil was the major export of Chester in the 1800's. ■

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jack's first book, Private Eyelashes: Radio's Lady Detectives won the Agatha Award for Best Non-Fiction. A new book, compiled by him and David S. Siegel, entitled Radio Rides the Range: A Reference Guide to Western Drama on the Air, 1929-1967, will be released by McFarland Publishing in late 2013.*

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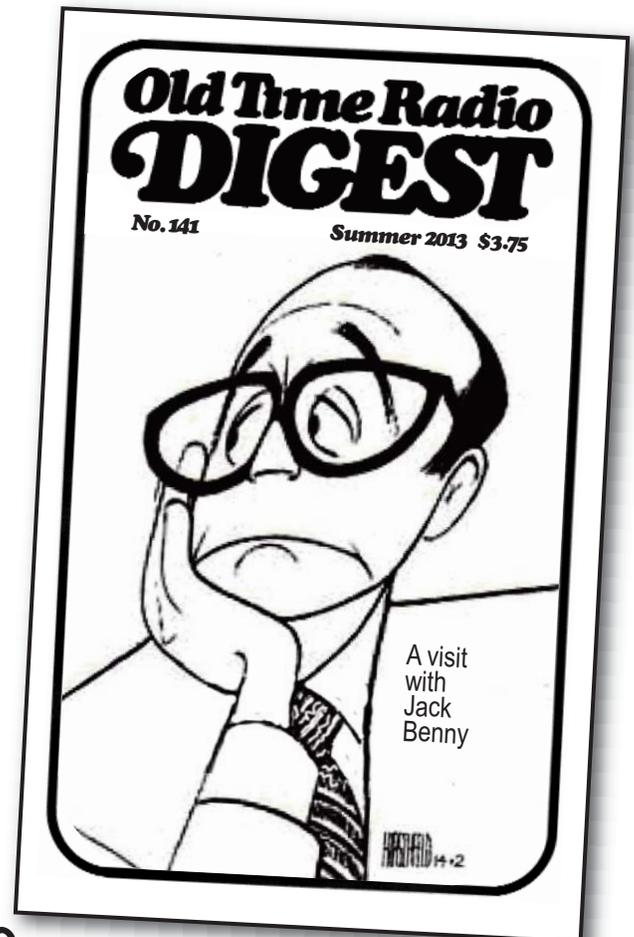
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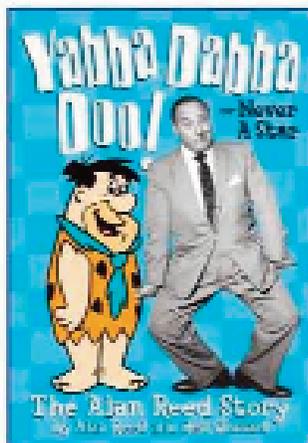
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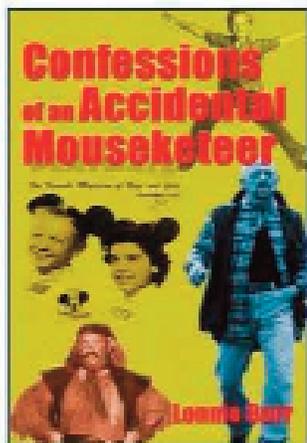
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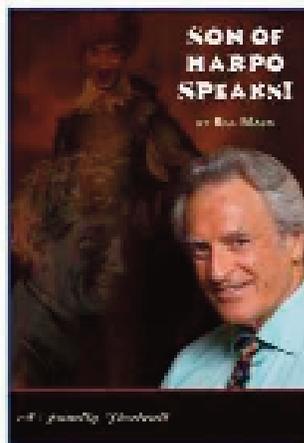
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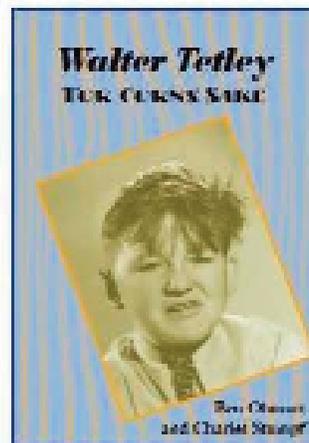
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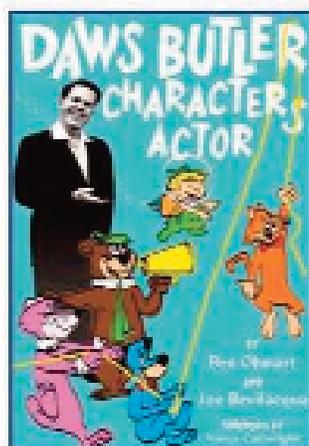
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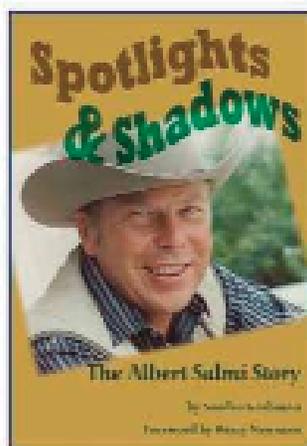
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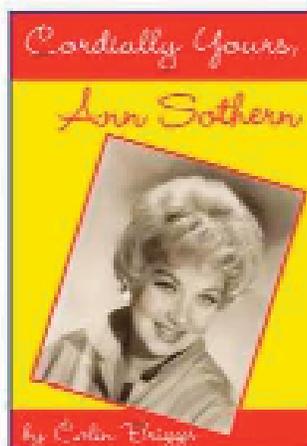
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## Some John Shepard History

by Donna Halper

John Shepard III (born March 19, 1886; died June 11, 1950) was a controversial figure in Boston radio from the 1920s through the 1940s: some people found him ruthless and abrasive, but he was also an innovator. Here are only a few of his achievements:

On July 31, 1922, WNAC signed on at 250 m; Shepard (alias “JS”: announcers only used initials back then) and various of Shepard Department Stores employees worked on air. (A month earlier, his brother, Robert, who owned Providence's Shepard store, had put WEAN on the air.)

In mid-August, 1922, WNAC broadcast live music from the successful Broadway show “Shuffle Along”, which is on tour in Boston. This may be the first time a black musical has been heard on the air, and among the performers are Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, who do hit songs from the show. Another broadcast of “Shuffle Along” music was done in conjunction with the Boston Radio Exposition at Mechanics Hall in early November, and was very well received. Shepard has had black performers on the air since the earliest days of his station, including several classically trained vocalists.

WNAC and WEA (New York) linked up on January 4, 1923 for the first chain broadcast. (It would last for only five minutes, but it showed that chain broadcasting could be done.)

On October 11, 1923, John Shepard was elected Vice President of the National Association of Broadcasters, at the group's first convention, in Chicago. On December 10 of that year, Shepard is among a small delegation of influential broadcasters who meet with President Calvin Coolidge to discuss the future of radio

broadcasting.

WNAC was the first station in Boston to offer live broadcasts of synagogue services, beginning January 20, 1924; Rabbi Harry Levi, “the Radio Rabbi”, becomes the first rabbi to use broadcasting as a way of teaching tolerance and



educating the public about what Jews believe. He becomes so popular that two books of his radio sermons are issued.

On May 13, 1925, WNAC's sister station WNAB went on the air at 1200 kHz. Shepard also introduced “house names”—his secretary, Bertha Mitchell, was known on the air as “Jean Sargent”; she had begun broadcasting bedtime stories in 1923. When she left in 1925, she was replaced by another woman, who was also given the on-air name of “Jean Sargent”.

WNAC did what may be the first live broadcast of a Boston Red Sox home game, versus the New York Yankees, on April 13, 1926. Gus Rooney, of the Boston Traveller newspaper, did the play by play of the first games.

On January 31, 1927, WNAB changed its call letters to WASN—Air Shopping News; it was the prototype for what we know today as home shopping. Unique for its time, it featured an all-female staff—the Station Manager was Marion Smith, and one of the announcers, Grace Lawrence, would become a regular with the Yankee Network later on. Another staff member, Claire Crawford, will become one of the few women in radio sales during the 30s.

By June of that year, WBIS—“Boston's Information Service” was on the air at 990 kHz; its hours were very limited, and it also broad-

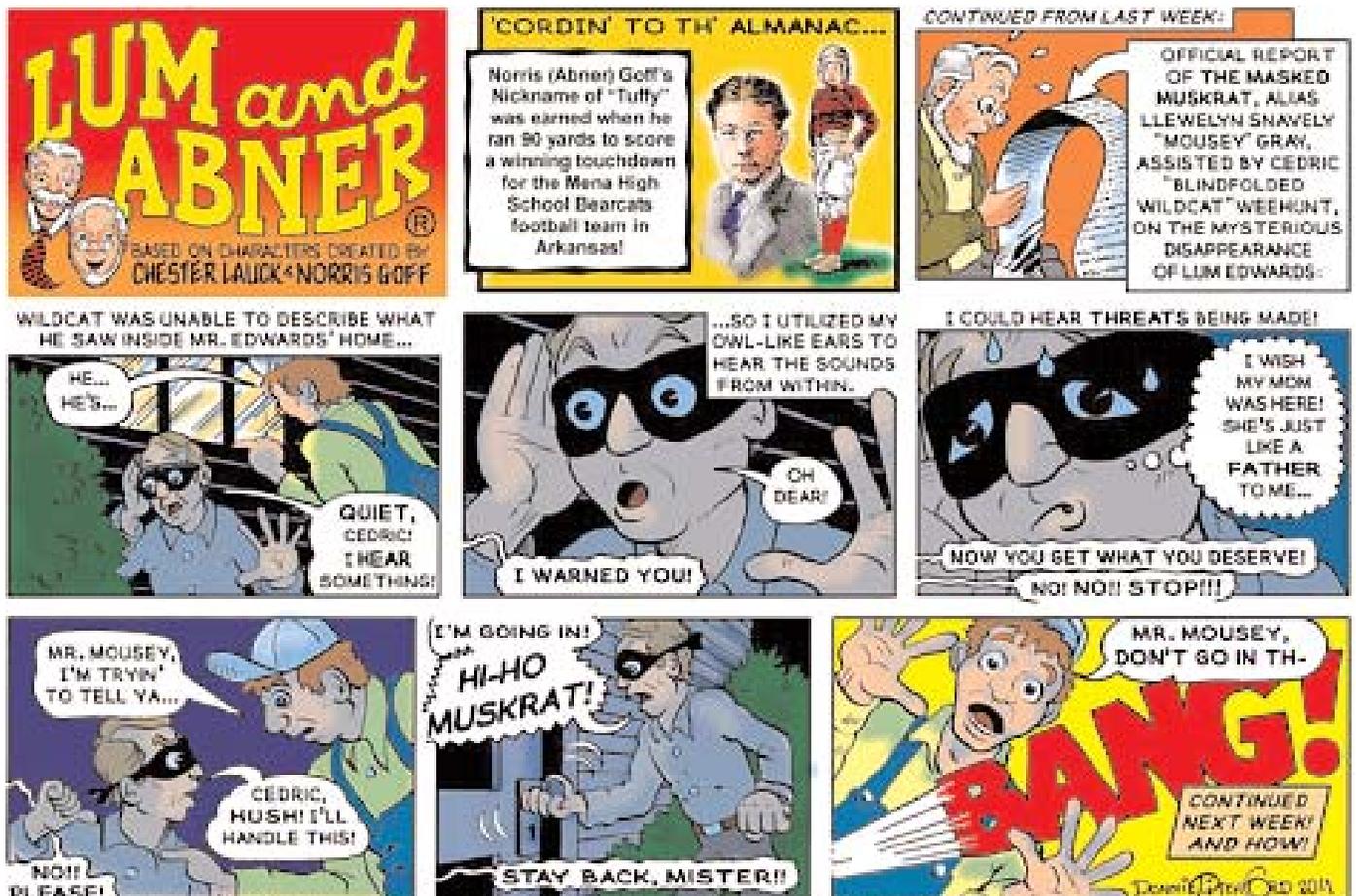
cast shopping news, as well as some phonograph records (obtained from the record department of the Shepard Store). WBIS would replace WASN.

Meanwhile, WAGS, a low-power station (only 5 watts) in Somerville had gone on the air at 1200 kHz; its owners will ultimately move it to Lexington where it would become WLEX in October, 1927. The owner of WAGS, and later co-owner of Boston's first TV station, W1XAY, was J. Smith Dodge. Jack Dodge began as an announcer on WGI, and then went to WNAC as an engineer, a position he held simultaneously with working on WAGS. Clearly, Shepard knew about and was supportive of Dodge's venture.

On May 25, 1930, Shepard, who had shared some WNAC programming with his brother Robert's Providence station WEAN since the

early 20s, expanded that link into the Yankee Network, adding WNBH, New Bedford, as his first affiliate station. There would soon be affiliates all over New England. WLEX joined the Yankee Network on January 20, 1931; by April 20, Shepard would own the station. WLEX became WAAB, operating out of the same Boston studios as WNAC (now at the Hotel Buckminster). Meanwhile, Shepard had promoted Claire Crawford to Assistant Sales Manager of the Yankee Network; she was the first woman in New England to hold a management position of that level.

In March of 1934, frustrated by a lack of cooperation between the local newspapers and his Boston stations, Shepard, assisted by one of his managers, Leland Bickford, starts his own news service for his affiliates. It was called



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the Yankee News Service, and in a slap at newspapers, the slogan the network uses is “News while it is news”. Shepard had become part of the “Press-Radio War”——at the time, newspapers had succeeded in persuading Congress to legislate against radio, such that stations were only allowed to air two newscasts a day. The Yankee News Service won the right to do more than two newscasts; in fact, some of the news reporters Shepard hired came from print journalism, most notably Dick Grant, of the Boston Evening Transcript. Shepard's efforts on behalf of his radio reporters result in all broadcast journalists getting the same access and press credentials that only newspaper reporters had gotten previously.

Shepard began a second network, the Colonial Network, in August of 1936; Colonial is in smaller markets and has stations with lesser signals than the Yankee Network. WAAB in Boston became the flagship station; the network aired some Mutual programming.

On August 18, 1937, Shepard was granted a construction permit to put the first FM station in Massachusetts on the air. It was licensed to Paxton, west of Worcester, and would operate from Asnebumskit Hill. Through his chief engineer Paul DeMars, Shepard had met and become impressed with FM inventor Edwin Armstrong, and threw his support 100% behind FM, even to the point of starting an organization of FM Broadcasters. Several sources say he even lent Armstrong money to continue his experiments. W1XOJ went on the air on May 27, 1939, with 2000 watts. To get the programming from the Boston studios of the Yankee Network out to Paxton, a low power relay station (W1XOK, with 250 watts) was also set up. On April 29, 1941, W1XOJ became known as W43B. Also in late December of 1937, in order

to devote more time to his broadcasting ventures, Shepard closed the Boston Shepard Store; his brother's Providence store remained open.

In November of 1939, a dispute between Shepard and a disgruntled former employee, Lawrence Flynn, led to Flynn forming his own company, Mayflower Broadcasting. Flynn tried to get the FCC to award WAAB's license to Mayflower; while his efforts failed, the FCC decision in the case, called the “Mayflower Decision” would forbid radio from editorializing or taking stands on issues. (Shepard, who was very opinionated about politics, had been letting his favourite candidates have more airtime than those he opposed.) That ruling would not be reversed until the late 1940s.

Continuing with FM experimentation, Shepard's engineering team put a new station on the

## WONDERS OF RADIO



—N. Y. Globe

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air: W1XER, on Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, on December 18, 1940. (The station has been a 500 watt Weather Service station known as W1XOY.) Once W1XER is up and running, Shepard is able to link it with W1XOJ and create the first FM network.

On March 20, 1942, with great fanfare, the Shepard stations and the Yankee Network moved to state-of-the-art new studios at 21 Brookline Avenue, near their former location, the Hotel Buckminster. Then, on September 30, WAAB was officially moved from Boston to Worcester, where it would make its first broadcast on December 13. (Shepard had been trying for years—unsuccessfully—to get a station in western Massachusetts; he had even tried to move WLEX out there, but to no avail.) WAAB's building would eventually become home to the FM station. In November of 1943, W43B became WGTR (General Tire and Rubber), after the General Tire Company purchased a controlling interest in the Yankee Network. Shepard remained with the corporation in an executive capacity until 1949.

John Shepard died in June of 1950. His brother Robert continued to run the Providence Shepard store until 1970, when he sold it; the store was closed in 1974. The Shepard family maintained a charitable trust for many years; among its gifts was a 1972 donation of \$7000 to WERS at Emerson College. Shepard's widow Mabel died at the family home in Brookline in 1992; she was 102. The Yankee Network, which John Shepard had founded, made its last broadcast on February 26, 1967. ■

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*Donna L. Halper is a radio consultant and a broadcast historian. She is on the faculty at Emerson College, where she teaches the History of Broadcasting*

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## **OTRR ACQUIRES NEW EPISODES AND UPGRADED SOUND ENCODES FOR May/June**

This is a list of newly acquired series/episodes. They may either be new to mp3 or better encodes. These were acquired by the Group during the months of May and June. They were purchased by donations from members and friends of the Old Time Radio Researchers. If you have cassettes that you would like to donate, please e-mail [beshiresjim@yahoo.com](mailto:beshiresjim@yahoo.com) For reel-to-reels, contact [david0@centurytel.net](mailto:david0@centurytel.net) and for transcription disks [tony\\_senior@yahoo.com](mailto:tony_senior@yahoo.com)

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### **Amos N Andy**

1950-01-15 Brown vs Brown.mp3  
1950-01-21 Mama & Hubert Smithers.mp3  
1950-01-29 Stolen Suits.mp3  
1950-02-04 New Parking Lot.mp3  
1950-02-18 The Best in Town.mp3  
1950-03-04 Sapphire on Television.mp3  
1950-03-19 Andy Romances Eloise Walker.mp3  
1950-03-26 The Happy Stevenses.mp3  
1950-04-02 Andy Goes to Charm School.mp3  
1950-04-16 The Census Taker.mp3  
1950-04-23 Lodge Convention in Chicago.mp3  
1950-04-30 Andy Inherits 25,000 Dollars.mp3  
1950-05-07 Battle Over Andy's Inheritance.mp3  
1950-05-14 Andy and the IRS.mp3  
1950-05-21 Summer at Pine Crest Lodge.mp3  
1950-10-01 Kingfish is Drafted.mp3  
1950-10-08 Kingfish is in the Service.mp3  
1950-12-17 Sapphire Leaves the Kingfish.mp3

### **Broadway's My Beat**

52-07-05 The Stacy Parker Murder Case.mp3  
53-07-04 The John Rand Murder Case.mp3

### **Crime Does Not Pay**

49-12-12 Gasoline Cocktail.mp3

### **Crime On The Waterfront**

49-02-24 Audition Show.mp3

## Fibber McGee & Molly

55-03-31 The Owl And The Pussycat.wav  
55-04-03 Little Boy Lost.wav  
55-04-04 McGee Looks For His Raincoat.wav  
55-04-05 McGee Discovers A Talent.wav  
55-04-06 In The Recording Session.wav  
55-04-07 Les' Career Is Over.wav  
55-04-11 The Shopping Crush.wav  
55-04-12 McGee Thinks Parking Meters Are Coming.wav  
55-04-13 Someone Keeps Phoning the McGees.wav  
55-04-15 McGee Gets A Pedometer.wav  
55-04-17 McGee Finds An Old Unopened Letter.wav  
55-04-18 Molly Insists The Windows Be Washed.wav  
55-04-19 Molly Gets Tired of Doc's And McGee's Insults.wav  
55-04-20 The McGees Offer To Babysit.wav  
55-04-21 The First Day Of Sitting.wav  
55-04-24 McGee Judges A Beauty Contest.wav  
55-04-25 The Noise Abatement Committee.wav  
55-04-26 Doc And McGee Vie In A Golf Match.wav  
55-04-27 The Golf Match Continues.wav  
55-04-28 The Golf Match Finally Concludes.wav  
55-05-01 The Mystery Ladies Society.wav  
55-05-02 McGee Finds A Phone Number In An Old Wallet.wav  
55-05-03 Molly Gets Her Christmas Cards Ready.wav  
55-05-04 Molly Gets A Plumbing Job.wav  
55-05-05 Doc Gamble Lays McGee Up.wav  
55-05-08 McGee Writes To His Congressman.wav  
55-05-09 Molly Gets Jury Duty.wav  
55-05-10 McGee Finds A \$1 Error In His Bank Statement.wav  
55-05-11 McGee Learns About Business Problems.wav

55-05-12 McGee Loses A Tune.wav  
55-05-15 The McGees Take In A Movie.wav  
55-05-16 McGee Finds An Old Recipe For Chili.wav  
55-05-17 Doc And McGee Fix The Garage Lock.wav  
55-05-18 Chef McGee.wav  
55-05-19 Running The Malt Shop.wav  
55-05-22 All You Can Eat For A Dollar.wav  
55-05-23 The Streamliner Belt.wav  
55-05-25 The Bee Swarm Invades.wav  
55-05-29 Fun Night At The Elks Club.wav  
55-05-31 McGee Brings Molly The Wrong Dress.wav  
55-06-01 The Lost Kid.wav  
55-06-05 McGee Makes Some Ice Cream.wav  
55-06-06 McGee Works out His Activity Guide.wav  
55-06-07 McGee's Mentality.wav  
55-06-08 Frugal McGee Is Stuck Downtown.wav  
55-06-09 Nightclubbing It.wav  
55-06-12 The Chipmunk.wav  
55-06-13 McGee Forgets A Special Day.wav  
55-06-14 McGee Finds A Stock Certificate.wav  
55-05-24.wav  
55-05-30 McGee Is Caught At The Cleaners.wav  
55-05-26 The Bee Man.wav

