



Volume 34, Number 4

April, 2009

## Little Orphan Annie

(continued)

by

Paul Barringer



The start of the Ovaltine Decoder Pins can be attributed to 1934 when Ovaltine started the "Radio Orphan Annie's Secret Society", with membership in the fan club including a handbook and a pin indicating membership. In the handbook there was a method introduced for kids to code and decode secret messages among society members. It consisted of a simple (and often used) method of taking the 26 letters of the alphabet and the first 26 numbers in the numbering system and assigning a number to each letter with consecutive numbers and consecutive letters used. An example would be; A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, etc. In the method used in the handbook, however, the encrypting came about by giving each letter double its' numerical position, so A = 2, B = 4, C = 6 etc. continuing through the alphabet where Z would equal the double numerical value of 26, therefore, Z would = 52. With the addition of the & character and assigning a 27th number doubled in value, & = 54, the word "and"

could be included in the message without writing it out.

It was in the year following the start of the fan club that Ovaltine introduced the 1935 ROASS, (Radio Orphan Annie's Secret Society) decoder pin. Every year the sponsor would have a different name for its' decoder pin, for example, in 1936 it was the Secret Compartment decoder, in 1937 it was The Sunburst, in 1938, The Telematic, in 1939 The Mysto-Magic, and in 1940 it was called the Speedomatic Decoder Pin. Due to the shortage of metals, "copper and brass", the 1941 Slidomatic Radio Decoder was made from paper, (card stock) as was the 1942 Whirlomatic Radio Decoder. Keep in mind, the Decoder Pins promoted each year were not the only mail-in items offered. Many different items would also be promoted, such as those noted earlier in the article. Some other items offered were a good luck medal, Annie sheet music, a map of Simmons Corners, a book about dogs, a secret compartment ring and more.

Ovaltine was mindful not to leave out our neighbors to the North when making their promotional offers, so when the address was given where to send your Ovaltine inner seal, and your money, to receive your premium, they also gave an address for those in Canada to send their Ovaltine inner seal, and money, so they could get their premiums also. So as you can see the decoder pins, other premiums, and Ovaltine itself, became a very essential part of the program, as was the announcer, Pierre Andre with his deep resonant voice, plugging Ovaltine a couple of times during each episode.

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**Cincinnati's 23rd Old Time Radio and Nostalgia Convention;** April 24 – 25, 2009, Cincinnati North Hotel, Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (888) 477-9112, [haradio@hotmail.com](mailto:haradio@hotmail.com)

**SPERDVAC Convention;** May 1-3, 2009 at Beverly Garland's Holiday Inn, 4222 Vineland Ave., North Hollywood, Ca. 91602. For more information, E-Mail Jerry Williams at [MrJ1313@sbcglobal.net](mailto:MrJ1313@sbcglobal.net), [www.sperdvac.org](http://www.sperdvac.org)

**20th Annual Radio Classics Live! Sat;** May 2, 2009, Buckley Performing Arts Center, Massasoit Community College, Brockton, MA. Contact Bob Bowers (508) 758-4865, [bobowers@verizon.net](mailto:bobowers@verizon.net) or Alan Chapman (508) 459-1864, [otrghost@gmail.com](mailto:otrghost@gmail.com)

**REPS Showcase convention;** June 26-27, 2009 at a Seattle location TBA. For info, <http://repsonline.homestead.com>

**34th Friends of Old-time Radio Convention;** Oct 22 – 25, 2009 at the Holiday Inn, Newark, NJ; Info; Jay Hickerson, 27436 Desert Rose Ct, Leesburg, FL 34748 (352) 727-6731, [JayHick@aol.com](mailto:JayHick@aol.com), or web site <http://www.fotr.net>

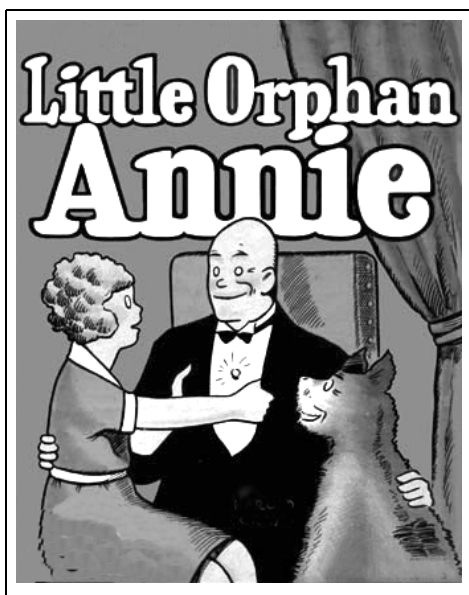
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**RETURN WITH US NOW...**

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**April, 2009**

**Miscellaneous information on the strip, the radio program and its' cast:**



Once in the comic strip "Daddy" Warbucks was on trial "for conspiracy to defraud", with the prosecutor being "Phil O. Bluster" and the crooked "Judge Cogg", who was part of the prosecutor's political machine. Also in the strip, one story line followed Warbucks losing his fortune, becoming blind and being thrown into prison, at which time Annie was on her own again, but, as always, Warbucks was able to right the ship and bounce back.

Another story line has Warbucks railroaded into a private insane asylum run by Dr. Le Quaque (Quack??). This strip raised quite a ruckus in many areas, and was objected to in many newspapers and by mental institutions, but Annie's publisher and her creator, Gray, stood behind the strip. As I said before, Gray had his own agenda, and was not prone to taking his critics to heart, saying "Annie is tougher than hell, with a heart of gold, and a fast left, who can take care of herself, because she has to. She's controversial, there's no question about that, but I keep her on the side of motherhood, honesty and decency."

Although Gray did well in the salary department during the time he drew the comic strip, (Nothing near the fortune made by Warbucks in the strip) he worked long and hard to earn it, spending as much as seventy-hours a week doing the six daily and one Sunday strip. Ten hours a day seven days a week. We would be hollering for over time and double time on Sunday if we were working those hours. Plus, this hectic schedule lasted for 45 years. Incidentally, it was said in the strip that Warbucks

made his first million by the time he was 21-years-old.

Sandy, Annie's dog, never uttered more than "Arf" during the run of the strip.

We all remember the white collared and white cuffed red dress worn by Annie in the strip, but did you know the dress wasn't introduced until November of 1927? It was at this time that the very notable trademark was born.

In 1979 in the comic strip, the "Little" and "Orphan" words were dropped from the title and the strip was presented only as "Annie". As on the radio program, Annie's friend Joe was replaced by a new friend called "Hucky Flynn".

As late as 1962, Annie was third in popularity in the comic strips, behind only Blondie and Dick Tracy.

In 1995 Annie was featured on a U.S. Postage stamp, along with 19 other comic strip characters.

The catch phrases used most often by Annie in the strip were "Leapin' Lizards!" and "Gee Whiskers"

The strip also had Annie creating "The Junior Commandos" which caught on with readers and schools, where groups were established and kids went about collecting recyclable items and materials, such as scrap metal and newspapers. These were quite successful in many areas.

On the radio program, when Shirley Bell was cast as Annie, she was only ten years old. Shirley did all of the whining by Sandy on the show. Brad Barker did Sandy's barking. Olan Soule, the Chinese cook on the program, was like so many other character actors on radio and on television, (Mason Adams, Ned Beatty, Lyle Betger, Ted de Corsia, Edward Binns, and Dabbs Greer, to name a few) whose voice and/or face were so recognizable, but whose name very few people could remember.

Soule's lean slender frame and the fact that he wore glasses falsely represented his voice. If you are one of those who remembers the face, the voice, or the name but just can't put them all together, here is some help. Soule was the choirmaster on the 1962 TV episode of the *Andy Griffith Show* "Barney and the choir". Soule also had recurring TV roles on *Dragnet*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *My Three Sons*, *Perry Mason*, *Petticoat Junction*, and *Rawhide*, as well as many more appearances on television, where he played anything from court clerks or store proprietors to hotel managers. You name it; he played it.

Boris Aplon, one of the actors who played Warbucks on the program, was also Ivan Shark on the "*Captain Midnight*" radio program, where he was that character for nearly 12 years. He also was the narrator on "*Lights Out*" for a time.

Henry Saxe, who also played Warbucks, appeared on the "*Crimson Wizard*" radio program alongside Olan Soule.

Stanley Andrews, another actor who played Warbucks, was the narrator known as "The Old Rancher" on the radio version of "*Death Valley Days*"

### **The radio program was always referred to as Radio's Orphan Annie, not Little Orphan Annie.**

In the 1935 Secret Society booklet, Annie had seven rules that she expected every member to obey before they were entitled to wear the official pin of the Secret Society. Briefly and abbreviated they were:

1. Do the things my parents tell me.
2. Get plenty of exercise.
3. Study hard at school and home.
4. Get lots of sound sleep.
5. Eat and drink the things my mother wants me to.
6. Drink my Ovaltine at least 3 times a day.
7. Be a loyal member of Radio Orphan Annie's Secret Society.

"I hereby agree to keep these promises to Radio's Little Orphan Annie to the best of my ability."

Signed .....

(Write your name right on this line)

### **About Ovaltine**



Ovaltine was originally called Ovalmaltine, but when the product was exported to England from Switzerland in 1909, a misspelling in the registered

trademark resulted in the name being changed to Ovaltine in the English and American markets. The reference to Ovaltine has been used widely in numerous movies, television shows, musicals, etc. for years. Claims on the program by Ovaltine included saying it helps kids that are nervous, it helps kids who are skinny and underweight, and it makes kids strong, husky and bubbling over with pep and energy.

Those of you who have saw the movie "A Christmas Story" will remember Ralphie decoding a secret message from the radio program, after just receiving his 1940 decoder pin in the mail, (and leaving the rest of the family mail in the mailbox) whereupon Ralphie expresses complete disdain and grief when the decoded message reads "Be sure to Drink Your Ovaltine". Although the scene probably gave most of the viewers a chuckle as it did me, in reality, the sponsor never used the secret messages to push its' product. The only message in them was a clue as to what would be happening on the upcoming episode.

Also in the movie, if you listen closely to what code setting the announcer says to set the decoder pin on, and knowing the code letter and number is paramount to solving the message, you will see a discrepancy in the number relating to the letter, and the code setting. The announcer says, "The setting for tonight's secret message is B-2", but as he gives the first word, the first number is 12, if the setting is B-2, then the first number given, should have been 2 indicating the first letter in the word "Be". But, nobody is perfect.

In 1990, Annie was inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame.

### **Orphan Annie vs. Orphan Ann**

At the start of this article I said, don't confuse Orphan Annie with Orphan Ann. Now, the explanation is as follows:

Orphan Ann was the voice of an American citizen named Iva (pronounced Aiva) Toguri d'Aquino, who, in 1941 was in Tokyo and as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor became stranded. In need of work, Iva got a job as an announcer on "Radio Tokyo" which eventually lead to her being given the pseudonym of Orphan, (referring to the character of Orphan Annie and a term used by our allies down-under, (The Aussies) during the war to describe their comrades who became separated from their units and/or their allies) and Ann (the abbreviation for announcer).

To make a long story short, Iva eventually became falsely known as "Tokyo Rose", the sultry voice on Japanese radio, as heard by our servicemen abroad. After the war, Iva would be tried and convicted of treason in the United States. Before she went on trial, the case was investigated by American intelligence agents who concluded that "Tokyo Rose" was merely a product of military rumor and legend, her activities on Japanese radio during the war lacked implied suggestiveness or impetus on any part of the war, and there never was anybody called "Tokyo Rose" on Radio Tokyo. But, due to public outcry and political pressure she was put on trial anyway. She was later released in January of 1956 for good behavior. After two unsuccessful petitions to Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson for clemency, it wasn't until 1977 that President Gerald Ford, as one of his last acts before his term as president was up, granted Iva a pardon. So, in a small, unusual and odd way Iva was inadvertently associated with the character of Orphan Annie. This is quite a story in itself.

In closing, I would like to ask, "who really was Annie's father?" In the comic strip her father was never named. Her stepfather, (so to speak), Warbucks, never adopted her nor gave her his name, and was gone half the time. So I say to you, who was the only person to always be there for her, never leaving her side, fighting all of her critics and her adversaries? Only one person fits the criteria .....that one person was Harold Gray, her creator, therefore I submit to you that Harold Gray was truly Annie's father.

*Research and excerpts for this article include, Time Magazine, Wikipedia, Earthstation, Radio Archives, Alaska.fm, Dyarstrait, Imdb, tapes/CD's/ROA decoder pins and handbooks in my collection, public library and misc. Annie web sites.*

**N.B:** *If you are one of us that have access to some of the 1936 episodes of ROA, you can download a 1936 Orphan Annie decoder pin at*

**[www.radioarchives.org/annie](http://www.radioarchives.org/annie)**

*So with a just a few clicks on your mouse or keyboard, you will be able to print out a decoder pin and decode the secret messages at the end of the program*

## A Little Trivia

By  
Dr. Charles Beckett



On a *George Burns and Gracie Allen* radio program (3-24-49) George and Gracie discussed the upcoming 1948 Academy Awards show. George said "Nothing is more important to an actor than winning one. It does a lot for his career." Gracie, always supportive, replied "If you had gone into the movies instead of radio, we'd have had Oscars all over the house."

Gracie, unfortunately, did not live to see George win the 1975 Best Supporting Actor award for his role in *The Sunshine Boys*. At age 80, he was the oldest Oscar winner in the history of the Academy Awards.

Actually, George and Gracie did appear in several movies as far back as the 1930s, mostly as featured players. Many years later, George, in addition to *The Sunshine Boys*, co-starred in other films including *Oh God!* (1977), two sequels (1980 and 1984), and *Going in Style* and *Just You and Me Kid* (1979).

Obviously, winning an Oscar so late certainly didn't hurt his earlier (or later) career.



And, another...

## Bit of OTR Trivia

by Paul Barringer



I'm sure all of you are familiar with the Geico Auto Insurance commercials on television, where celebrities help to tell the stories of real Geico customers.

One commercial involves a real Geico customer telling his story of how Geico answered his questions, and that he was able to talk to an actual human being over the phone. He and the celebrity, James Lipton, sit in the man's back yard, feet soaking in a pool. Lipton's lines: "You had questions. How existential. I've heard they were also quite beneficent and magnanimous. Human beings behaving humanly."

Some of you may know Lipton as a writer for several soap operas, (*Another World*, *The Edge of Night*, *Guiding Light*, *Return to Peyton Place*), as well as acting for over ten years on *Guiding Light*. Additionally, to his credit Lipton has also produced some two dozen specials including twelve *Bob Hope Birthday Specials*. He also appeared occasionally on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* doing comedy sketches.

But did you know this same man was also on radio? Not too unusual, that a person appearing on television also started on radio, the unusual part was one of the roles he played on radio.

Early in his career, Lipton portrayed the Lone Ranger's nephew, Dan Reid, during the early 1940s in Detroit, on radio's *The Lone Ranger*.

Who would have "thunk" it?



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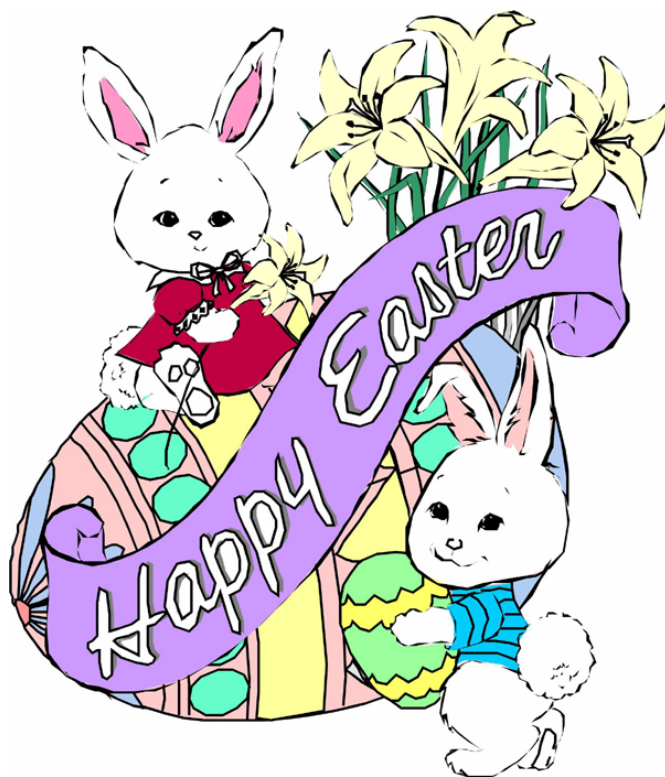
by Maletha King

This month we are offering two great series of shows for your pleasure and entertainment. We start with "Night Beat", the series about newspaper reporter Randy Stone and his quest for stories for his daily paper - he always finds a good one. These stories are emotional and interesting and play on some of the seedier sides of life.

Our second series is further episodes of "Screen Director's Playhouse". As many of you know, these are mostly shows adapted from films and hosted by the original directors.

One of the things I always find interesting about these radio shows is the credits at the end which often include the composer of the in-show music. Credit is due since the music is usually so well done that you are not really aware of it, but it adds a lot of reality to the show.

The directors of these shows were really artists on their own.



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