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Edith Meiser

The Other Woman in Sherlock Holmes' Life

By Dr. Charles A. Beckett

To listeners of the Sherlock Holmes radio programs, Irene Adler will be remembered as the only person during his professional career who outwitted the famous detective - during a potential blackmail case - and the only woman he remembered fondly. In *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, A Scandal in Bohemia* (12-10-45), starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce as Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, Holmes, while in disguise to spy on Irene Adler, was unexpectedly pressed into service as a witness at her wedding. In appreciation, the bride gave him a golden sovereign as a memento. Later, when telling Dr. Watson of the event, Holmes remarked, "I think I'll wear it (the sovereign) on my watch chain in memory of the occasion. It will remind me that I was once tricked by a woman, a woman that I will never forget. What a woman! What a magnificent woman!" Thereafter, whenever he spoke of Irene Adler, it was not by name. Instead, he referred to her admiringly as "THE Woman". Twenty years later, retired and living on a

bee farm in Sussex, Holmes would have occasion to be tricked by yet another woman - Irene (Adler) Norton's daughter- in *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, The Second Generation* (12-17-45). But that's another story.

Irene Adler, of course, was a fictitious character. However, there was another, real woman, Edith Meiser, who played an even more important part in the detective's existence. You might even say she gave him life. During the 1930s and 40s, She was the major writer-adaptor of the most, and some say the best, of the many Holmes radio adaptation series that aired over the years.



Meiser wrote her scripts in pencil on yellow legal pads in her bed or in her dressing room at the studio. For many years, she wrote each episode by herself, later receiving assistance from other writers, e.g. Leslie Charteris, Denis Green, Anthony Boucher. In the beginning, she followed the storylines of the original Sir Arthur Conan Doyle short stories and novels. When she ran out of original material, she created new stories, but retained some of the original characters. There were several other Sherlock Holmes radio series before and after the Rathbone and Bruce version, but arguably Meiser established the standard for the plots and tone of the Sherlockian age as Rathbone and Bruce set the standard for portraying the characters.

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2009 Convention Schedules

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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 or Alan Chapman (508) 459-1864, 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, or web site <http://www.fotr.net>

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RETURN WITH US NOW...

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May, 2009



Edith Meiser had an early and unexpected start in her association with the Sherlock Holmes character. When she was about five years old, her parents took her to see a play starring famed Sherlock Holmes stage actor William Gillette--who also portrayed Holmes in the first episode of the radio version of the series in 1930. He was then followed by some other actors before Rathbone and Bruce put their brand on the characters in 1939. Meiser had a second encounter with Holmes eight years later - when she was 13 or 14. She and her family were on a ship headed for Europe, where she would be attending school. In her words, "I became very seasick, and my mother went to the purser and asked if there was something to help me through the trip. His 'cure' was to give my mother a volume of the Holmes stories. I read the book through twice, and forgot all about being sick." Throughout her lifetime, Meiser was never quite able to end her relationship with Holmes very often or for very long. During a stopover in London on her way back to America, she again encountered him in person - well sort of - during a visit to Madame Tussad's Wax Museum near Baker Street. She even thought she had gotten a glimpse of his tall, angular figure stepping from a carriage and entering one of the buildings. 221b Baker Street, perhaps? Or was it just a young woman's fancy? Regardless, it seems that Meiser was destined from an early age to spend much of her life entwined with that of the famous fictional detective.

Edith Meiser's life, however, was not quickly or

easily overtaken by Sherlock Holmes. Back in America she attended Vassar College, intending to become a social worker. While there she became interested in acting and joined the Vassar Players, even touring the country with them to raise money for the school. After graduating in 1921, she became a member of the Jessie Bonstelle Stock Company, and appeared in several mystery plays. (Another omen of her future career path?)

Two years later Edith again graduated, this time to Broadway, where she performed in such shows as *The Guardsman*, and *The Garrick Gaieties*, for which she wrote lyrics to composer Richard Rodgers songs.

Never one to rest on her laurels, by 1927 Meiser had become a headliner in a Vaudeville circuit - opening at the Palace Theater in New York. Tom McKnight, who wrote her act, later partnered her in marriage. The stage phase of her career was a brief one however - lasting only about a year. Talking pictures were beginning to sound a death knell for Vaudeville. So, Edith and her husband decided to move on to greener pastures, and began writing material for radio shows. Edith remembered "My first radio series was *Polly Preston*, a fifteen minute mystery aired once a week over NBC. The show had a villain named 'the man with the pointed ears' which appealed to young people all over the country". In their writing partnership, Edith did mostly mysteries and her husband did most of the variety and music shows. Their writing efforts included *The Bob Hope Show*, *The Hallmark Hall of Fame Show*, *The Irving Berlin Show*, and *Will Rogers*, among others.

Some other Meiser radio script writing credits include *Helen Hayes Theater* (1935-36), *The Life and Love of Dr. Susan* (1936), *Lunch at the Waldorf* (1940-41), and *The Shadow* (script editor, 1938-54). Until the actor's union was born, Edith even performed in acting roles on some of the shows she wrote. Her version of *A Christmas Carol* was recorded by Basil Rathbone, which Meiser remarked later, "is one of my treasured memories." (Another, oblique Sherlock Holmes connection?)

Turning another corner in her career, Edith left radio and moved from New York to California to become a script writer for RKO Pictures. But a studio reorganization found her once again back in radio in New York - before she had an opportunity to write her first movie. Later, when she returned to Hollywood to supervise the Sherlock Holmes radio series, in her spare time she even managed to make a

movie or two. As late as the 1950s, she appeared in other movies, including *Queen for a Day* (date?), *It Grows on Trees* (1952,) and *The Middle of the Night* (1959), the screen version of a Paddy Chayefsky play - playing Frederic March's sister. She felt that she was miscast, but Chayefsky assured her she was perfect for the part - and who would be a better judge?

As mentioned earlier, throughout her life and career Meiser had difficulty separating herself from Sherlock Holmes for very long. Her "official divorce" from him came after finishing an assignment during March 1954 to February 1955 as continuity writer for the *Sherlock Holmes* comic strip in the *New York Herald* newspaper. She even revised some of her radio scripts to fit the comic strip format. However, "unofficially," Meiser was never able to completely sever her relationship with Holmes. Her long and varied career included writing 85 new Sherlock Holmes radio adventures.

In New York City there is an organization known as "The Baker Street Irregulars," the oldest literary society dedicated to Sherlock Holmes, founded in 1934 by American author Christopher Morley. That same year, at a dinner meeting of the group, according to Anthony Tollin, (biographer of Edith Meiser, and co-author with William Nadel of *Sherlock Holmes Radio Companion*) "... for the next five decades, Edith would meet, be toasted, and in turn, host at her apartment, many of the Irregulars. In 1991, she received final recognition for all she had done for Holmes by being invested as 'A Fascinating and Beautiful Woman' in that hitherto all male group. Into her nineties, Edith would swim every morning and kept an active lifestyle until her death at the age of 95." (She was born May 9, 1898 and died in 1993).

Irene Adler had been the fictional Woman in Sherlock Holmes life, of course. But, Edith Meiser was the real Woman who breathed life into his character. As Holmes might have described her, "What a woman! What a magnificent woman!"

Writer's note: *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *A Scandal in Bohemia* and *The Second Generation* are available in the RHAC Tape Library (tape 1675).

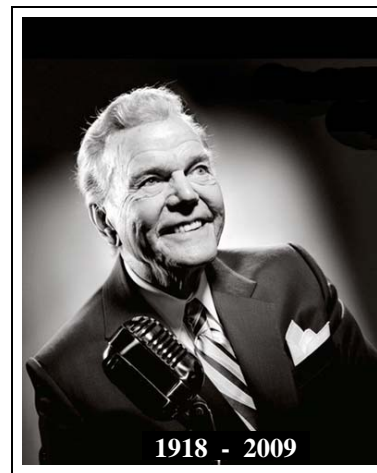
References: John Dunning, *On the Air, The Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio* (1998).

Anthony Tollin, *Smithsonian Historical Performances, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1998)

In Honor of a Silenced Voice ...

Paul Harvey

By Paul Barringer



On February 28, 2009, we, the listeners of radio, lost another long time radio personality. On that day, the voice of Paul Harvey was silenced due to his death at the age of 90. Paul Harvey's career spanned more than seven decades and his voice was that of a trusted friend in many American households.

One of the most gifted and beloved broadcasters in the history of this nation, Harvey delivered the news each day with his own unique style, characteristic delivery and dramatic pauses as he presented his folksy commentary.

He was born Paul Harvey Aurandt, September 4, 1918 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As a young boy in 1933, at a high school teacher's suggestion he started working at KVOO radio in Tulsa. At first Harvey was used only as a person to clean up around the station.

Eventually this led to him being allowed to fill in on the air, reading news and commercials. Harvey continued working at station KVOO as an announcer, and later as a program director, while he attended the University of Tulsa.

After spending three years as a station manager for a local station in Salina, Kansas he moved to a newscasting job in Oklahoma City at KOMA. He then moved to KXOK, in St. Louis, where he was Director of Special Events and also worked as a roving reporter.

In 1940 he moved to Hawaii to cover the United States Navy in the Pacific. He was returning to the mainland from assignment in Hawaii when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He served briefly

as an enlisted man in the United States Army Air Forces during World War II. After leaving military service, Harvey moved to Chicago, where in June 1944, he began broadcasting from the ABC affiliate WENR, where he quickly became the most popular newscaster in Chicago.

Harvey began hosting the postwar employment program *Jobs for G.I. Joe* on the station in 1945. This is where Harvey added *The Rest of the Story* as his tagline to the in-depth feature stories in 1946. Later, in 1976, on the ABC Radio Network these spots became their own series.

It was on April 1, 1951 that the ABC Radio Network debuted Paul Harvey News and Comment "Commentary and analysis of Paul Harvey each weekday at 12 Noon".

Originally, Paul Harvey was heard on Sundays. The first Sunday program was Harvey's introduction. Later, the Sunday program would move to Saturdays. The program continued ever since. In the late '60s and through the early '80s, there was a televised five-minute editorial by Paul Harvey that local stations could insert into their local news programs or show separately.

The Rest of the Story premiered on May 10, 1976 on ABC Networks as a separate series in which Harvey provided endless surprises as he dug into stories behind the stories of famous events and people. The series was created and produced by Harvey's son.

It was in late 2000 that Paul Harvey signed a 10-year, \$100 million contract with ABC Radio Networks. But, the good fortune was short lived for Harvey, as a few months later; he was off the air after damaging his vocal cords. In the latter part of August 2001 he returned to the program.

Termed the largest one-man network in the world, his News and Commentary was streamed on the World Wide Web twice a day. It was also carried on 1,200 radio stations, 400 Armed Forces Network stations around the world, and in 300 newspapers.

Not only had a gifted man of the spoken world, Harvey also successfully extended his talents to the written word in books and newspaper columns. Many of his broadcasts and columns have been reprinted in the U.S. Congressional Record. (Harvey having the distinction of having more reprints than any other commentator.)

He was a very loyal man to the sponsors of his programs; Harvey said **"I am fiercely loyal to those willing to put their money where my mouth is."**

This is quite evident in the way he segued from his monologue into reading his sponsors commercial messages.

Several people substituted for Harvey from 2006 to 2008, including former Senator Fred Thompson, son Paul Harvey Jr., Doug Limerick, Paul W. Smith, Gil Gross, Ron Chapman, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Scott Shannon, and Tony Snow.

Harvey did not host the show full-time after April 2008 when he came down with pneumonia. Shortly after his recovery, his wife (Who he called his Angel on the program) died on May 3, causing him to prolong his time away from broadcasting. Some compare Harvey's on-air persona to that of sportscaster Bill Stern.

He was well known for the catch phrases that he used at the beginning of his programs, such as "Hello Americans, I'm Paul Harvey. You know what the news is, in a minute, you're going to hear ... the rest of the story," and, "Paul Harvey News and Commentary, and this is ... (day of the week)," I most fondly remember his last words at the end of each broadcast in which he said, "Paul Harvey ... Good day."

Harvey received many awards during his career including Salesman of the Year, Commentator of the Year, Person of the Year, Father of the Year, and American of the Year. Paul Harvey was also elected to the National Association of Broadcasters Radio Hall of Fame and Oklahoma Hall of Fame and appeared on the Gallup poll list of America's most admired men. In addition to these many awards Harvey also received 11 Freedom Foundation Awards as well as the Horatio Alger Award. He was named to the DeMolay Hall of Fame, a Masonic institution, on June 25, 1993.

Not to be forgotten was the award in 2005 from then President George W. Bush of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Which is the United States' most prestigious civilian award. On May 18, 2007, he received an honorary degree from Washington University in St. Louis.

Having listened to him daily on the radio here in Denver, I remember one of his statements years ago, that went something like this, "They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but how many of us remember Confucious? We do not remember what he looked like, but what he said."

And that, in Paul Harvey's words, is the rest of the story.

... Good day, Mr. Harvey...

The Trivial Matter of Some of OTR's More Obscure Sponsors

By Carol Tiffany

Match the Sponsors with the OTR shows listed below: (hint... many were Juveniles)

(Answers elsewhere on this page)

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| _Blue Coal | A. <i>Nick Carter, Master Detective</i> |
| _Swift's Premium Franks | B. <i>Ozzie and Harriet</i> |
| _Maxwell House Coffee | C. <i>Jack Armstrong</i> |
| _Wildroot Crème Oil | D. <i>Chandu, The Magician</i> |
| _Luster Crème Shampoo | E. <i>Little Orphan Annie</i> |
| _Old Dutch Cleanser | F. <i>Richard Diamond, Private Detective</i> |
| _Quaker Puffed Wheat & Rice | G. <i>The Shadow</i> |
| _Wheaties | H. <i>Archie Andrews</i> |
| _Ovaltine | I. <i>Captain Midnight</i> |
| _Rio Grande Oil Co. | J. <i>Gene Autry's Melody Ranch</i> |
| _Skelley Oil | K. <i>The Jack Benny Program</i> |
| _White King Soap | L. <i>The Adventures of Sam Spade</i> |
| _Camel Cigarettes | M. <i>Our Miss Brooks</i> |
| _JELLO | N. <i>The Challenge of the Yukon</i> |
| _Wrigley's Gum | O. <i>The Burns and Allen Show</i> |
| _Rogers Brothers Sliver | P. <i>Calling All Cars</i> |

From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany



Well, here we are in April, whose showers should be ushering in May's flowers. Unfortunately, our lack of precipitation might mean a significant reduction in those fragrant Mothers' Day bouquets. Here at RWUN, however, we always have something new and different... not requiring irrigation... to keep the spring in your thoughts and steps.

In this issue Dr. Charles Beckett exposes the REAL woman in Sherlock Holmes' life... (NOT Irene Adler) someone who was actually part of the inner circle of the Baker Street Irregulars. Also this month Paul Barringer says farewell to another Paul, a true OTR immortal, Paul Harvey.

Good listening and reading to all...

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New in the Tape and CD Libraries

by Maletha King

This month we are entering several reels of "The Falcon", a private detective named Mike Waring, who was always a gentleman. The star role was played by many different actors. We also have a reel of the "Lone Ranger" Both of these programs follow the trend that was set in radio entertainment for detective and western shows in the 1950's.

Next we have a show, particularly for members who have been holding their tapes for longer programs, called "The Big Show". This was with Tallulah Bankhead and many other guests that we will all remember from the 50's. These are 1-1/2 hour shows that will give you a chance to use up some of those longer tapes and cassettes.

Finally, last but certainly not least, on behalf of the RHAC Board, the staff of RWUN and myself, I want to wish all mothers a very happy ...



Trivial Matter Quiz Answers

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| G Blue Coal | A. <i>Nick Carter, Master Detective</i> |
| H Swift's Premium Franks | B. <i>Ozzie and Harriet</i> |
| O Maxwell House Coffee | C. <i>Jack Armstrong</i> |
| L Wildroot Crème Oil | D. <i>Chandu, The Magician</i> |
| M Luster Crème Shampoo | E. <i>Little Orphan Annie</i> |
| A Old Dutch Cleanser | F. <i>Richard Diamond, Private Detective</i> |
| N Quaker Puffed Wheat & Rice | G. <i>The Shadow</i> |
| C Wheaties | H. <i>Archie Andrews</i> |
| E Ovaltine | I. <i>Captain Midnight</i> |
| P Rio Grande Oil Co. | J. <i>Gene Autry's Melody Ranch</i> |
| I Skelley Oil | K. <i>The Jack Benny Program</i> |
| D White King Soap | L. <i>The Adventures of Sam Spade</i> |
| F Camel Cigarettes | M. <i>Our Miss Brooks</i> |
| K JELLO | N. <i>The Challenge of the Yukon</i> |
| J Wrigley's Gum | O. <i>The Burns and Allen Show</i> |
| B Rogers Brothers Sliver | P. <i>Calling All Cars</i> |

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