

Volume 37, Number 6

November/December, 2012

Perry Mason on OTR

by Paul Barringer

Paul Barringer, a RHAC member, is a popular and frequent contributor of articles for RETURN WITH US NOW. The following has been edited to meet space requirements.

What do all of the following names have in common? Warren William, Ricardo Cortez, Donald Woods, Bartlett Robinson, Santos Ortega, Donald Briggs, John Larkin, and Monte Markham. If you haven't guessed by now, let me add one more name: Raymond Burr. Did that give it away? Most of you remember that Raymond Burr played Perry Mason on television, so did you guess correctly that the rest of the names mentioned were actors who also portrayed Erle Stanley Gardner's famous defense attorney?

Gardner's first writing efforts were published in pulp magazines after he had tired of his job with a law firm, where he worked as an apprentice, while studying to pass the bar exam. Even Gardner had to admit, the stories he wrote for the pulps were less than to be remembered.

His first Mason novel was published in 1933 under the title, "The Case of the Velvet Claws." Mason's supporting cast in the Gardner written novels, included Della Street (Mason's secretary), Hamilton Burger (The district attorney), and Mason's private investigator, Paul Drake. In the early novels about Mason the character was seen as more of a detective/lawyer type, somewhat like

Dashiel Hammett's Sam Spade. Callous, unfeeling and not against using the law to suit his own agenda.

He was not above deception and trickery and knocking in a few skulls, getting involved in dangerous car chases, breaking and entering, manipulating and making up false evidence, etc. But it wasn't long before Gardner turned more to the knowledge gained in more than twenty-years of studying, and law practice, and introduced his novels more along the lines of the science and forensics of medicine. Although the novels were a great success, the movies introduced on screen in 1934 didn't fare so well.

The first few Mason films portrayed him much like Gardner's characterization in his novels. But they soon transformed into cheaply made B-type movies, produced with short-cuts, with lesser quality than most other movies.



You have to be an old-timer to remember Warren William, Ricardo Cortez and Donald Woods in those 1930 vintage Warner Brothers black and white films featuring the hard-hitting attorney. But, do you to remember names such as Bartlett Robinson, Santos Ortega and John Larkin? Each has starred as Mason on RADIO. (Continued on Pg. 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150

Dedicated to the preservation of old-time radio programs, and to making those programs available to our members

Old-Time Radio is Alive and Well in Colorado!

"When Radio Was" KEZW 1430 AM Weekdays, 6:00 - 7:00 PM Pirate Radio 104.7 FM & www.pirate1047.com - "Radio Memories" (Greeley) Sunday, 6:30 - 12:00 PM KRMA TV Channel 6 Secondary Audio Program (SAP), "Tribute to OTR" Monday, 5:00 - 6:00 AM

RHAC Web Site - http://www.rhac.org

RHAC Email - info@rhac.org

Hear RHAC on the web, 4th Sunday of every month, at 8:30pm Mountain time at; "OTR From The Rockies" - http://www.yesterdayusa.com/saturdaylive.htm

RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of the Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Cost of membership is \$25.00 for the 1st year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member in good standing has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below. Any mention of a product in RETURN WITH US **NOW...** does not constitute an endorsement by RHAC.

President: Larry Weide Vice-President: Herb Dunivan Barrett Benson Secretary: Treasurer: Bill McCracken Newsletter: Fred Hobbs Larry Weide Membership: Tape Donations: Bill McCracken Herb Duniven

Directors at Large: Fred Hobbs Dennis Kavanaugh

Terry Hamilton

LIBRARIES

Bill McCracken Reference Material: Open Position Logs & Scripts:

Cassette Tape:

#1 (1-499) David Gatch PO Box 70 Glen Haven, CO 80532 (970) 577-0805

#2 (500-999)

#3 (1000-2000) Terry Hamilton 6225 S. Clarkson St. Centennial, CO 80121 (303) 794-1739 #4 (5001-up) David Gatch PO Box 70 Glen Haven, CO 80532 (970) 577-0805 Terry Hamilton 6225 S. Clarkson St. Denver CO 80121 (303) 794-1739 CD Library:

2012 Convention Schedules

Nov. 9, 10 & 11 2012 SPERDVAC Old-Time Radio Convention

Hacienda Hotel & Conference Center at LAX, 525 N. Sepulveda Blvd., El Segundo, CA 90245-4496 For information and registration form, Wesite: sperdyac.org - email: sperdyac@aol.com - Phone: 1 (877) 251-5771 - Mail: SPERDVAC, PO Box 669, Manhattan Beach CA 90266-0699

Because of Gardner's negative experience with the six mediocre films made in Hollywood, an episode that was very hard for him to swallow, it came as a real surprise that he agreed to have Perry Mason appear on radio, much less on a "Soap Opera." Gardner, disregarding friends' advice to have Mason featured on a prime-time night program, decided to surrender the rights to his character to Proctor and Gamble, who decided to put the radio show on during the daytime.

First appearing on only a few stations in October of 1943, within three months the program was heard five days a week on radio stations across the nation in a fifteen-minute presentation. After failing poorly as a scriptwriter for the "soap opera" version of his hero's exploits, Gardner, in his own words, admitted that his strengths were in writing the narrative and not in scripting.

The sponsor then hired a new scriptwriter named Irving Vendig. At first Gardner disliked everything about the new process, including the plots, the commercials, and even the production of the show.

Gardner eventually learned to appreciate the newly crafted character of Mason and the scripting by Vendig. However, he continued to receive royalties and to monitor the show after Vendig assumed the new responsibilities.

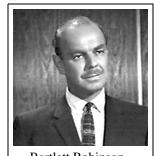
On the radio program, the stories held listeners in suspense for weeks on end, as Mason "did his thing", unlike most other mystery type shows at the time, in which each plot line was presented in its entirety in one 15 or 30 minute time period.

Along with the mystery and excitement, the program included the usual soap opera daily fare, women and their men and the many problems involved in their lives. A typical episode of the program would open with organ music playing in the background and the announcer saying, "It's 4:15 in the afternoon, sometime after the close of our last episode." The scene would shift to either the courtroom, Mason's office or to the scene of an investigation in the case Perry was handling at the time.

The program would end in the prescribed quarter hour with a "cliff hanger," causing the listener to wait until the next episode to discover what happens next.

A detective in a soap opera?? It must have worked because the program aired for a dozen years, from October 18, 1943 to December 30, 1955.

Bartlett Robinson was the first to voice Perry Mason on radio. Robinson started his career in 1933 working on stage in New York and alternated back



Bartlett Robinson

and forth from California where he did films and radio. In addition to playing Mason, Robinson appeared on radio soaps including "Valiant Lady," "Young Doctor Malone," "Mary Noble - Backstage Wife," "The Romance of Helen Trent" and "Portia Faces Life" where he played the husband. Robinson was also a regular on "Yours Truly Johnny Dollar" during the last years of "The Golden Age of Radio."

Robinson then turned his acting talent to television where he appeared on many shows, from "Cheyenne" to "Hawaii Five-0", "Bonanza", "Lou Grant", "Gilligan's Island", "The Andy Griffith Show," "Kung Fu," "The Munsters," "The Rifleman," "Cannon," "Wild Wild West," "The Twilight Zone" and even the very successful TV run of "Perry Mason."



Santos Ortega

Santos Ortega, another radio voice of Perry Mason, was active in other programs such as "Big Sister," "The Amazing Mister Smith," "Blackstone Plantation" and "Bright Horizon."

He played title roles in "The Adventures Of Nero Wolfe," "Bulldog Drummond," and "Charlie Chan." He appeared as Inspector Queen on "Ellery Queen." Ortega also portrayed Commissioner Weston, on 'The Shadow" and was one of the announcers on radio's "Gang Busters." Ortega's TV credits included the role of Will Hughes (Grandpa), on the long running television show "As The World Turns,", performing until shortly before his death.

Also portraying Mason on radio was Donald Briggs, another versatile actor who also appeared on Old Time radio favorites, including the 1934 version of "The Adventures of Frank Merriwell", an heroic

figure whose exploits were revisited in a 1946 Saturday morning airing on NBC. Other Briggs performances occurred on "Betty and Bob," "City Desk," "David Harum," "First Nighter" (as the friendly and pleasant host), "Girl Alone", "Grand Hotel", "Hilltop House", "Portia Faces Life", "The Story of Beth Johnson," and "Welcome Valley."

Briggs also did many films, one of which was an appearance as the Merriwell character. On TV he was seen in shows including Bonanza, My Favorite Martian, Wild Wild West, Batman, Felony Squad, Hazel, Suspense, and Naked City.



John Larkii

The last actor to voice Mason on radio, and the one with the longest run in the role, was John Larkin, also noted for his starring role as the crime-fighting attorney, Mike Karr on the television daytime drama The Edge of Night. The Karr role was originally supposed to be an extension of the Perry Mason character to be played on television, but due to ownership rights to the Mason character, and a falling out between creator Erle Stanley Gardner and the network, Gardner withdrew his support for the show.

Among Larkin's many roles on radio were appearances on "Backstage Wife," "The Brighter Day," "The Chicago Theatre Of The Air," "Helpmate," "Houseboat," "Hannah," "Lone Journey," "Ma Perkins" (another long running soap), "Portia Faces Life"and "The Romance Of Helen Trent." Larkin also was one of the actors who voiced Buck Rogers on radio's "Buck Rogers In The 25th Century." Larkin also made four appearances on the Perry Mason television show.

Other memorable voices on the Perry Mason radio presentation: Jan Miner, Joan Alexander and Gertrude Warner at different times playing Mason's loyal female assistant, Della Street; (I have written about Jan Miner in other articles for *Return With Us Now* so, I will just say she had a long and varied career in both radio and television and not list all of her appearances here. Joan Alexander was most notably Lois Lane on Superman; and Gertrude

Warner was best known, perhaps, as Margot Lane on "The Shadow,"

Also heard were: Matt Crowley and Charles Webster as Paul Drake; Frank Dane and Mandel Kramer as Lieutenant Tragg. Announcers on the show were Bob Dixon, Alan Kent and Richard Stark.

Estimates indicate that more than 3200 scripts were written for the radio series, with dozens of actors and actresses appearing on the long running mystery/soap opera presentations.

I remember that Perry Mason only lost one case during the show's run, but in a retrial, he proved his client innocent. With that thought in mind I would like to interject a little levity into this article. There are a couple more incidents in which Mason actually lost a case.

Once Jack Benny did a comedy skit about himself, in which he was accused of not being funny. Perry Mason is retained as his attorney to defend him. Mason (played by Raymond, the star of the TV Mason shows), was unable to prove Benny indeed, was "funny", and lost the case. On the Benny television show, in a dream sequence, Jack is charged with killing a chicken. Once again Perry Mason defends Benny, but loses the case through his incompetence.

It's odd at times how the mystery field (as well as others) intertwines with the novels written, with movies, comics, television and RADIO, sometimes coming full circle joining them all together in one way or another. But maybe it's not so odd, after all, it's still entertainment and the only difference is in the way you view them.

Or in the case of Old Time Radio, what you use to LISTEN to them.

Research and sources for this article include: Public Library, IMDB, Wikipedia, Radio Nostalgia Network, Radio Archives, Big Broadcast, Radio's Golden Years, Wayback.net and other web sites and books.

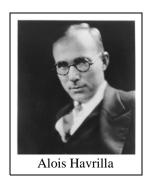
GOLDEN VOICES IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO

By Fred Hobbs, RHAC Member

Can a person be born with a nearly fanatical interest in a specific occupation? Researchers and psychologists may have an answer. All I know is that when I was about four years old I already was in love with radio. When I grew up I didn't want to be a cowboy, a policeman or a fireman. I wanted to be a radio announcer!

My big brothers told me that the voices that came out of that sturdy-looking wooden console in the living room were from little men. (Not too many women's voices on radio back in the early 1930s.) Sneaking a peek behind the Majestic, no little men were in sight; all I saw were glowing tubes, some wires and what I learned was a "speaker."

Confirming my suspicion that my brothers were "trying to pull a fast one", I nonetheless remained curious and mystified about the origin of those voices. I liked to hear them, especially the announcers with their rich, authoritative voices, perfect diction and impeccable pronunciation.



The name of the first announcer I can remember sounded strange to me and even if I could have known how to spell anything at that age, I would have never known how to spell the name: Alois Havrilla. I was too young to notice when he served as Jack Benny's announcer on NBC for Chevrolet, a few years before Don Wilson joined the show. Havrilla also was announcer/host of "Strange As It Seems" (CBS, 1939), a thriller I probably wasn't supposed to be listening to.

Announcers just after the dawn of radio broadcasting were expected early on to adhere to established protocols and possess special talents for the job. "The Radio Announcer's Handbook," by Ben G. Hennek, Director of Radio at the University of Tulsa, published in 1948, cites both CBS and

NBC requirements for announcers. They were essentially the same. The NBC directive called for "a good voice; clear enunciation and pronunciation free of dialect or local peculiarities; ability to read well; sufficient knowledge of foreign languages for the correct pronunciation of names, places, titles, etc." along with some knowledge of musical history and ability to sell when delivering a commercial. Last, but not least, a college education was required.

Today's radio stations have pretty much abandoned those strictures and formalities of OTR in favor of chit-chat, talk shows, sports jargon and "wild and crazy" disc jockeys.



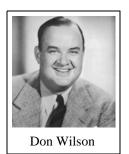




Oh, to hear again the erudition of announcing pioneer Milton Cross on the Saturday Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, the mellow voicings of Norman Brokenshire on the United States Steel Hour, or Ed Herlihy, the chief spokesman for Kraft Foods whose voice made Velveeta seem like Camembert.

Most of the attention given to Old Time Radio centers on anecdotes and biographies of the great comedians, dramatic actors, singers, musicians, even writers and producers, but seldom on the announcers.

So, let's explore the careers of three of the top talents among the impressive list of announcers on OTR. Each was a great on-air salesman, each possessed a flair for comedy and a presence which was easily woven into the main fabric of the show on which he appeared.



Immediately, the aforementioned Don Wilson comes to mind. Although he was featured as the announcer or actor on a host of OTR's best offerings, Wilson is immortalized as the jolly, supposedly over-sized member of the wise-cracking crew that drove Jack Benny to distraction.

Wilson's hometown was Denver. Legend has it that he was fired from an early gig at Denver's KFEL and told by management he would never make it in radio. If true, Wilson must have used his signature hearty belly laugh many times when recalling the decision of the hapless station executive who made that prediction.

In addition to a 21-year stint with Benny, Wilson was heard on radio favorites including The Aldrich Family, The Al Jolson Show, Baby Snooks, Chance of a Lifetime (as MC),

Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou, The Doris Day Show, and Command Performance. He also appeared in a few film roles, (usually type-cast as an announcer) and on The Jack Benny TV Program.



Harlow Wilcox

Rivaling Wilson as an announcer who also played a key part in a show's comedic dialogue, there was "Waxy." That's the term Harlow Wilcox was affectionately called by the master of the house located at 79 Wistful Vista. Every Tuesday night on NBC, Wilcox dropped by to chat with Fibber McGee and Molly. Somehow, he was able to weave into the conversation some practical advice such as how to keep the kitchen floor beautiful and protected with Johnson's Glo-Coat.

As the book Radio Speakers by Jim Cox points out, Wilcox came from show biz roots. His parents were musicians in a circus band. In his early years, he performed on stage and worked as a successful traveling salesman, attributes that helped him develop as a top-notch network radio commercial spokesman.



A much different approach to announcing was offered by Bill Goodwin. He delivered commercials on a host of OTR programs. A versatile performer, Goodwin also appeared on radio offerings as an

actor (Atlantic Spotlight, Bill Goodwin Show in the 1940s) and emcee (*Dollar a Minute* 1950-51.)

Goodwin coupled his straightforward and sincere pitches on both The George Burns/Gracie Allen and Frank Sinatra shows with comedic flashes in the broadcast persona of a brash, ladies man; for three years he competed somewhat in that same genre appearing on Bob Hope's Pepsodent Show. Goodwin's network announcing credits date back to 1932 on the west coast Don Lee network. Two years later he was hired by CBS in New York. In the 1950s Goodwin demonstrated his talents on television variety and game shows and on the first year of the TV version of Burns and Allen.

When he wasn't behind a radio microphone or on the small screen, Goodwin spent considerable time on Hollywood sound stages appearing in 30 motion pictures. But it was his distinct, breezy style in delivering the spoken word that OTR fans like to remember.

Don Wilson, Harlow Wilcox, Bill Goodwin; three memorable voices from the Golden Age of Radio.

Sorry if your favorite voice from radio's comedic past wasn't honored here. Several other announcers whose talents were used in addition to the delivery of commercials could qualify: (Kenny Delmar as Senator Claghorn on The Fred Allen Show; Rod O'Conner on The Red Skelton Show, Graham McNamee on Ed Wynn's Texaco Fire Chief Show, etc.)

Perhaps those and others can be featured in a future article in RETURN WITH US NOW.

P.S. The dream of the four-year old came true. I did enjoy a long career in local radio and television, though by no means reaching the pinnacle of success of the broadcasting legends chronicled here.

[Note] Fred Hobbs can be heard as the host of RHAC's once a month internet show on yesterdayusa.com. on the 4th Sunday of each month at 8:30MDT to hear "OTR From The Rockies". You can also hear all of our past shows at www.rhac.org.

ANNOUNCER/PROGRAM MATCH QUIZ

By Fred Hobbs



As avid OTR listeners, how much attention did you pay to the commercials and the announcers who delivered them?

Test your knowledge by matching the *program* with the announcer who was most closely associated with it.

Virtually every announcer during The Golden Age of Radio displayed his talent on more than one show, some as many as 20-25 in a career. And, sometimes a popular announcer appeared on separate programs aired on the same day, involving a mad dash from one network's studios to another.

Over the years, a particular program may have employed different announcers during specified periods.

All the announcers on this list appeared on the matching show for a *significant* period of time and are considered best known for that assignment.

Here's the list.

Tiere is the list.				
A. Your Hit Parade				
B. Art Linkletter's House				
Party				
C. Kraft Music Hall				
D. Gene Autry's Melody				
Ranch				
E. Captain Midnight				
F. The Lone Ranger				
G. Manhattan				
Merry-Go-Round				
H. You Bet Your Life				
I. Aunt Jenny's True Life				
Stories				
J. Dr. I.Q.				

Answers on this page

From the officers of the Radio
Historical Association of Colorado
and the staff of the "Return With
Us Now" newsletter



We wish you the merriest of Christmases and the happiest of New Years

Answers to announcer quiz

10 - E	ſ - δ
F - 9	I - Þ
S - 8	3 - D
A - T	2 - G
∀ - 9	H - I

Did your family have a radio like one of these, that the programs of the "Golden Age of Radio" were designed to be played on?

Email us with a story of your remberances about it and we'll print everyone's story in a group article in an upcoming newsletter.



TAPE	2 1966 ROCKY JORDAN			1200'
1L	06-05-49 The Man They All Loved			
	06-12-49 The Man From Damascus			
2L	07-17-49 The Race			
20	07-24-49 The Coward Of Mutakahn			
1R	07-31-49Barlochi 08-07-49Gold Fever			
	08-07-49 Gold Fevel		25.	
2R	08-14-49 Cairo Vendetta			
	08-21-49The Gum Queen			
TADE	E 1967 ROCKY JORDAN		ž.	1200'
1L	09-11-49 Adventure With Andrea	2		1200
12	09-18-49 The Nile Runs High			
2L	09-25-49 Memento For Adelaide 10-02-49 Pattern For Revenge			
	10-02-491 attent For Revenge			
1R	10-09-49 The Man With No Name			
	10-16-49 Quest For Tanina			
2R	10-23-49 The Deerwright Bowl			
	10-30-49 The Demarco Affair			
OT A TOT	I 40/0 DOCUMY YORD AN			10001
TAPE	E 1968 ROCKY JORDAN 11-06-49Black Ball			1200'
IL	11-13-49 The Strange Death Of Van Dorn			
2L	11-20-49 The Big Heist			
	12-11-49 The Veiled People			
1R	01-08-50 Smoke Screen			
	01-15-50The Loomis Affair			
2R	02-05-50 The Return Of Toni			
ZK	05-28-50 A Song In The Night			
700 A 30-	1440 DOOY37 1005 137			4800*
1API	E 1969 ROCKY JORDAN 06-04-50 The Word Of A Bishop			1200'
1L	06-11-50 Pharaoh's Formula			
2L	06-18-50 Shakedown			
	06-25-50 Dilemma			
1R	07-02-50 The Dead Colleen			
	07-09-50 Interlude With Lorena			
2D	07 16 50 The Lettre Com Of Assure De			
2R	07-16-50 The Lotus Cup Of Amun Ra 07-30-50 The Money Changers			

493

RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

TAPI	E 1970 ROCKY JORDAN / THE SHADOW	1200'
1L	08-06-50 ROCKY JORDAN: The Broken Wing 08-13-50 ROCKY JORDAN: City Of Baksheesh	
2L	08-20-50 ROCKY JORDAN: The Man From Damascus 08-27-50 ROCKY JORDAN: Dr. Markoff's Discovery	
1R	06-26-38 SHADOW: The Old People 07-10-38 SHADOW: He Died At Twelve	
2R	09-04-38 SHADOW: The Black Buddha 11-16-41 SHADOW: Case Of The Three Frightened Policemen	
TAPI	E 1971 THE BIG SHOW	1800'
1L	02-11-51#15: Guests - Andrews Sisters, Joan Davis, Judy Garland, Gordon MacRae	
2L	02-25-51#17: Guests - Jack Haley, Uta Hagen, Monty Wooley, Judy Holiday	
1R	03-11-51#19: Guests - Billy Eckstine, Bob Burns, Celeste Holm, Jimmy Durante	
2R	03-25-51#21: Guests - Don Cornell, Jimmy Durante, Rex Harrison, Judy Holiday,	
TAPI	E 1972 JIMMY DURANTE SHOW	1200'
1L	03-10-48 GUEST: Van Johnson - Campaign Manager For Women's Vote 03-24-48 GUEST: Victory Moore - Vacation Spots Survey	
2L	03-31-48 GUESTS: Rose Marie, Victor Moore - Tour Of Colleges For Youth Vote 04-07-48 GUEST: Dorothy Lamour - County Ready For Woman President?	
1R	04-14-48 GUEST: Victor Moore - Housing Problem 04-28-48 GUEST: Lucille Ball - Women Managing Industry	
	04-28-48 OOES1. Euclide Ball - Wolfieli Mahaging muusty	
2R	05-05-48 GUEST: Victor Moore - Transportation Problem 05-12-48 GUEST: Victor Moore - Should Man In White House Have A Wife?	
TAP	E 1973 JIMMY DURANTE SHOW	1200'
1L	05-19-48 GUEST: Victor Moore - Tour To Help The Small Businessman 05-26-48 GUEST: Victor Moore - Survey Of The Champions	
2L	12-17-48 WITH: Alan Young - Favorite Book: The Three Musketeers 06-10-46 GLAMOR MANOR: The Circus Is Coming To Town	
1R	11-08-53 EDGAR BERGEN SHOW: GUESTS - June Allison, Dick Powell 06-20-54 EDGAR BERGEN SHOW: GUEST - Nelson Eddy	
2R	12-10-41 TEXACO STAR THEATRE: Recent Foggy Spell - Death Valley Days	

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION of COLORADO

ORDER BLANK FOR CASSETTE LIBRARY #2 500 - 999

Librarian - David Gatch P.O. Box 70, Glen Haven CO 80532 (970) 586-2863

** Make Check Payable to "RHAC" **

Enclosed is my check or money order for the sum of \$_____ to cover the ONE MONTHS Rental charge of \$2.50 per set for the cassettes ordered. You are allowed to order 5 cassette sets at one time although you may only have 5 cassette sets from this library at one time.

Minimum order is \$7.50

Cassette number:		Title:		
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
Alternates:				
1	4	7	10	
2	5	8	11	
3	6	99	12	
Ship To:			Date	
Address:				
City		State	Zip Code	
I do hereby agree to for monetary gain a	•		gree not to sell or use	library materials
SIGNA	TURE		ONE NUMBER	-



RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION of COLO. PO BOX 1908 ENGLEWOOD, CO 80150

FIRST CLASS MAIL