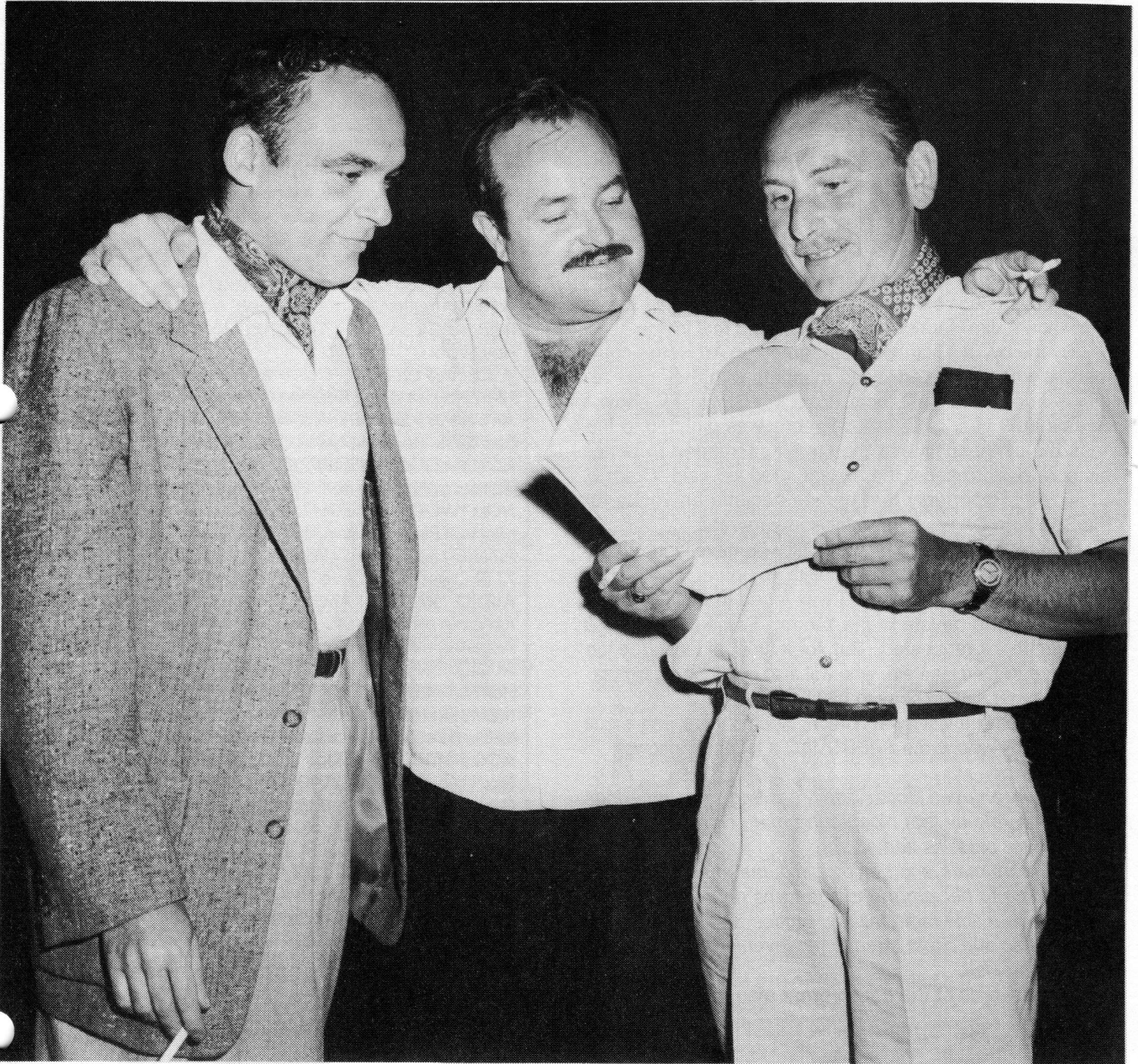


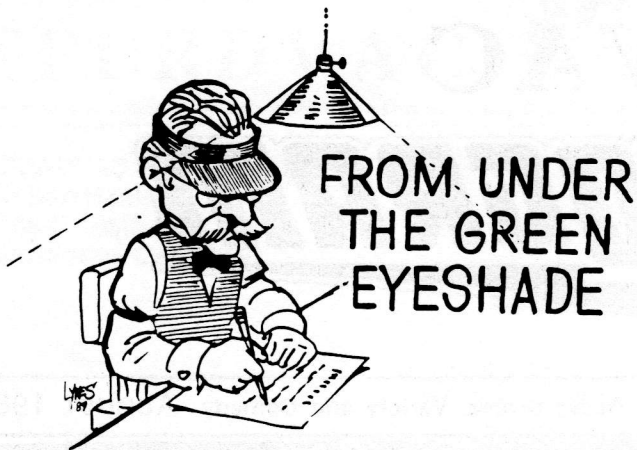
# SPERDVAC *RADIOGRAM*

Vol. XV, No. 8 The Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy AUGUST 1989



Left to Right: Antony Ellis, Wm. Conrad, Ben Wright prepare for a broadcast of **CBS Radio Workshop** in 1956. See page 6 for story on Mr. Wright's death. (Photo courtesy of Jan O'Hare.)





Some things to note--Prexy Larry had no items for his column this time, but that doesn't mean he won't come pounding back with a good 'un next issue. The archives library is temporarily closed. Please send back now your borrowed tapes, but hang on to your orders til further notice. It WILL reopen. So sad to note the passing of so many OTR persons at nearly the same time. Will LA station KFAÇ, the 50 year old classical music outlet, bite the electric guitar and go rock? Watch for it!

Mr. Bryson's article on Bill Stern is fascinating. Edison's hearing loss did come from a sort of accident. Do ya know how? Jim Harmon's on Art Hern is a real tribute.

By the by, Jim Harmon's paragraph on Art Hern's commercial where he interviewed moppets with their pets reminds one of our past local Bozo the Clown TV show. Seems an 8 year old street-wise boy was directed to the 'toss the clothespins into the jar' bit. Exhorted to better his poor performance, the exasperated kid said "Cram it, Clownie!" Reportedly that phrase became en vogue for the Southern CA work force for some months.

Swan Song Time--Thanks to all who have written your editor. It has been fun, but as with volunteer work, it became very time-consuming. T'was found that there wasn't enough time to devote to the 'Gram. Some time can still be given to it if requested. But, for a time, at least, the job will revert to Dan Haefele, who will also continue as circulation manager. Send copy to his address.

Can't resist a last try at humor. Seems there was a nice little old lady who wrote SPERDVAC a letter as follows:

*Dear Editor:*

*I have enjoyed occasionally visiting your meetings made possible by that nice young man, Dan, who brings me from my old folks home.*

*My room mate and I enjoy radio, but she often insists on listening to her programs and turns my radio off. The other day her little radio fell and broke. She asked to borrow mine so she could listen to her favorite program. I told her to go to Hell.*

In the words of the not so great man (me) I shan't return!

CIAO, RMK

## SPERDVAC DIRECTORY

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# LIVING LEGENDS No. 1

by Jim Harmon

Art Hern, energetic, multi-talented in his eighties, is representative of the solid school of the Chicago radio actor and indeed all of the great radio craftsmen, who, like Art, are still working in broadcasting.

In reading the SPERDVAC RADIOGRAM, it seems often the only time we read of these people is when they manage to speak at a meeting, or alas, when they sign their final cast sheet. This series will try to remedy that.

Art Hern says that the peak of his radio career was working on the **Captain Midnight** series. His regular role was Gardo, chief henchman of the evil Ivan Shark. In that part, he sounded as if he had been drinking canned heat, instead of healthful Ovaltine, but then he was one of the bad guys. Art could also double many other parts, so disguised was his voice. He did dialects--Russian, Chinese, German - whatever was called for. This began in the late thirties, and by the time the show went off radio in 1950, Art had joined the good guys and was the voice of Ichabod Mudd, Capt. Midnight's chief mechanic. Ed Prentiss had left the lead, and now Paul Barnes was the heroic captain.

After radio, and partly simultaneous with it, Art Hern went to a greater success in early TV, but it was a long road leading there.

Hern was born 14 Feb. 1907 in Mannington, WV. His father died when he was six months old, and in hardly two more years, his mother also died. Fortunately for Art, he still had his grandmother, who raised him, and several interesting aunts and uncles. His early years were spent in Chicago, but at 12 he moved to Milwaukee and eventually attended the University of Wisconsin. Was he active in the drama department there? No. His major was business administration.

A business career was not very likely with one uncle, Sig Hern, a well-known jazz or ragtime musician and another, his aunt's husband, Bert Brown, who managed a Milwaukee theatre for the famed Shubert Bros., however. Art began doing kid parts, character bits on his uncle's stage. Finally, one of the Shubert brothers noticed him and gave him a featured role opposite the famous actress, Nazimova, in the Henrik Ibsen play, **Ghosts**. This was the real beginning of show business for Art, something solid, something real.

In the closing months of 1937, Art Hern came back to Chicago, and began trying to break into the active world of radio acting there. It was a hard go. Like many others, he worked for \$5.00 a show, playing anything from a romantic lead to, more often, a character part with dialect. He did a lot of hillbillies on WLS between the country music, done live, their specialty.

The best bet was soap opera, the "strip" shows -- they went across the board, Monday through Friday. Today's soaps might be called "strip shows" for another reason.

Art appeared on **Backstage Wife**, **Arnold Grimm's Daughter**, **Road of Life**, **Helen Trent**, and others. Many of these shows were written and produced by the legendary Irna Phillips. She had a long nose and was al-

## SPERDVAC MEETING

Saturday  
12 August  
12 Noon  
**JACK  
SMITH**

**Thousand Oaks Library**

1401 E. Janss Rd. in Thousand Oaks

ways getting into people's business. She was known as "the Pelican" and not greatly loved, not by Art, at least.

Graduating to prime time, Art appeared on **First Nighter**, **Authors' Playhouse**, and was one of the regular leads on **Mystery House**, a series also featuring Forrest Lewis (one of the most versatile voices in radio, "Doc Green" and "Wash" on **Tom Mix**), and Rye Billsbury (Michael Rye) and Nanette Sergeant. While doing these shows, Art found that even a busy actor has to go to the washroom, and while drying his hands he saw a new face. "New here?" Art asked. The man nodded. "Musician." Art knew that the famous Horace Heidt Talent Search has just come to the station. "Heidt's band? I hear he's a real S.O.B. to work for." The man looked Art in the eye. "Depends on your viewpoint. I'm Heidt."

Besides **Captain Midnight**, Art Hern did many characters and dialect parts on other shows for kids, including **Tom Mix** and **Sky King**, working with his friends, Curley Bradley and Jack Lester. (Art and Jack still get together regularly after over forty years.)

It was natural that Art also do shows for kids on early TV. He was even in on playing in some of the first TV dramas ever done in 1939, telecast from the Zenith radio factory to one hundred sets in the Chicago area. When programming resumed after the end of World War II, around 1947, Art Hern became Natco the Clown for the National Tea Company, hosting **Kids' Karnival Kwiz** in a custom-made make-up, he had paid a real clown to design for him (\$50), one that let facial emotions show. He showed replays of **Flash Gordon** serials, interrupted by Natco doing as many as ten commercials per half hour, and by the jolly fellow interviewing little tykes with their pets. One day a puppy relieved himself on live TV. The camera cut away, but the kid kept repeating "Look, Natco, look -- he piddled all over the floor, all over the floor. . ."

Art Hern survived that to become the Pied Piper of TV, an elf in a pointed cap, whisking kids off to some educational lesson as he sped off on his magic top to the Magic Forest. He was also the sailor, "Moby", playing tricks on hefty Captain Dick "Two-Ton" Baker, 379 pounds of singing, piano-playing talent.

Today, Art may be seen doing an occasional commercial or featured role on TV. (Most recently he was on for MacDonald's.) He still loves radio and was a part of the brief 1983 revival of **Tom Mix** for Ralston. He is also on board for still another projected new radio series being attempted by the present writer, Jim Harmon. He remains one of those great craftsmen of the under-utilized art of radio drama. With examples like Art Hern, how can it ever be forgotten?



# Hugh's Hues

By Hugh Anderson

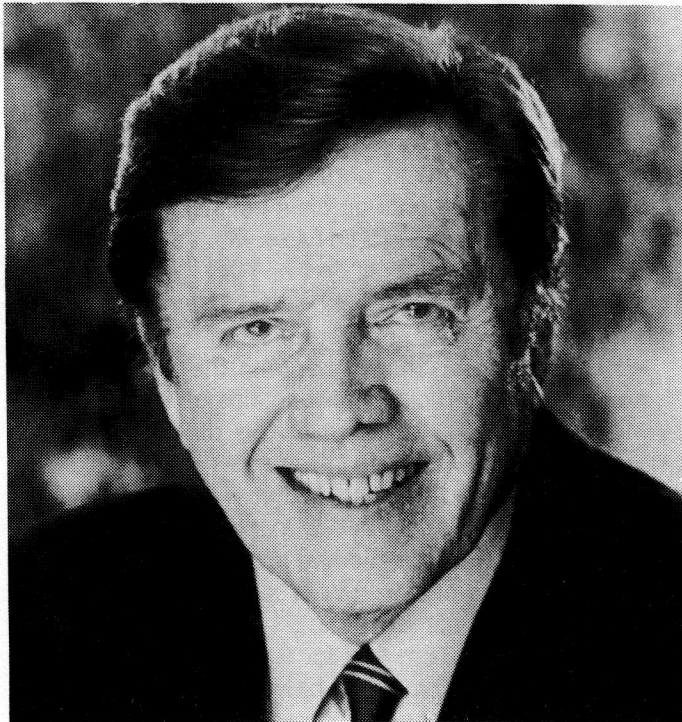
"Evenin', folks, how y'all? This is the old professor, **Kay Kyser**, bringing you at Sperdvac another edition of the Kollege of Musical Knowledge. Today, our student body numbers over 1600 so we expect a lot of good answers.

"You know, we just came thru San Francisco and I reminded myself of S.F. - I've got a big bridge, too. And while we were riding thru the Golden Gate city, Ish Kabibble remarked that I looked like San Fran - a wind swept knob and a big bay!

"All right, students! enough of that foolishness! It's August and time again for our mid-summer quiz. Yo'know, last time, y'all did pretty good but this time, I expect you to do better. So here we go, students! Unless I give you a different amount, each question is worth ten points."

## Professional Quiz

1. In "I Love a Mystery", what was the name of the detective agency? ("Sounds Like an A-1 answer to me") O.K., students, for five points each, name the three heroes.
2. For five points each, who were the four lead players in Gunsmoke?
3. Ed Wynn was "The Fire Chief." He was the first performer to bring a comedy play to radio. What was the name? ("Quiet, students! You'd be perfect fools to tell 'em.") Here's a musical bonus question - for five points each: Hum the first four notes of the dragnet theme song. What is the correct name of The Lone Ranger's theme song?
4. Who was the first partner and who was the last partner of Sergeant Joe Friday? Ten points each.
5. Metropolitan Opera Star Lawrence Tibbett followed Frank Sinatra in 1945 on "Your Hit Parade." Did the show's popularity go up or down after Tibbett became a



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regular? ("That's right! You're right!") Musical bonus time. Do you know the words to the first line of Hit Parade's closing theme? Fifteen points.

6. Name the top two science fiction anthologies, both broadcasting on NBC. ("X marks the spot!" "Students Who said that?")
7. What was the last name of Vic and Sade?
8. With two, how many years was "radio's outstanding theatre of thrills" on the air? Musical bonus time, students! Five points each: With what song is Bob Hope Associated? What was Rudy Vallee's theme song. And for ten points, what song did Jack Benny scratch out on his violin?
9. Who was the young, crew-cutted fellow who became famous working with Jimmy Durante? ("No more hints, students.") For fifteen bonus points, what famous team did they replace for their first program?
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*"O.K., students. Let's not tarry. Let's tally the score. Here's the answers - no cheatin' now!"*

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Some well known radio shows debuted in August. "Amos n Andy" began on NBC Red for Pepsodent, 19 August 1929 and continued until, 25 November 1960. Thirty one years. "Backstage Wife", one of the most successful efforts for Frank and Ann Hummert, began on 5 August 1935,

*Continued on next page. . .*



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# SPERDVAC MOURNS LOSS of RADIO PEOPLE. . .

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by Chris Lembesis

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It was with sadness that we were unfortunate to lose some of our most gifted artists who shined from their work in the Golden Age of Radio, and excelled also in the world of film and TV. We lost not only some of our Honorary Members, but those who would have made a welcome addition to our illustrious roster. We at SPERDVAC feel a particular loss, due to the opportunity many of us had, to know these individuals, and to work with them on various occasions. Here we reflect on their accomplishments as a celebration, and not as a loss at their passing. They were gifted artists with a special place to us.

## MEL BLANC -

### A THOUSAND VOICES . . . AND MEMORIES

With so much God-given talent this man possessed, one cannot believe Mel Blanc is no longer with us. When we lost him on 10 July 1989, we truly lost one of the most-beloved men in show business. To try to find the words to express his accomplishments in radio, cartoons, and TV, would be almost impossible. He made it work. Those voices and characterizations truly made the word GOLD-EN shine during the Golden Years of Radio and at Warner Brothers Cartoons.

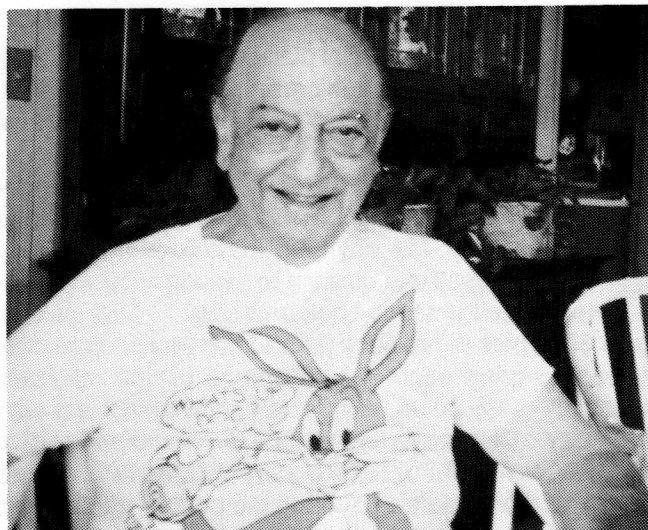
He worked long and hard at his craft. I cannot begin to think what **The Jack Benny Show** or all those cartoons would be like without him and his timing was something to behold.

His story starts in San Francisco, where he was born in 1908. As a youngster in Portland, Oregon, he loved to perform. He started developing his unique animal sounds while in high school. Oddly, his first radio work was in the NBC Orchestra as a bassist or violinist. When he married in 1933, he and his wife Estelle hosted a daily one hour show called **Cobwebs and Nuts**, doing all of the voices!

They moved to Hollywood in 1935, where Mel became a busy character actor in radio. He joined Jack Benny in 1937, while auditioning at Warner Brothers for additional voice work. As they say, the rest is history. he was proud of his work in cartoons. He created every voice, except one. Radio great Arthur Q. Bryan was Elmer Fudd. Perhaps one of the hardest voices to do was Porky Pig. As Mel recalled, the secret was to stutter and ad lib in rhythm.

Besides **The Jack Benny Show**, his other radio work included **The Burns and Allen Show** (the happy postman), **The Abbott & Costello Show**, **Fibber McGee and Molly**, **The Judy Canova Show**, **The Mel Blanc Show** (Where did he find the time to do all this?). **The Cisco Kid** (as Pancho, filling in for Harry Lang), **Point Sublime**, and on and on. Mel recalled he did the bear growl on the Benny show for six months, but one day approached Jack and said "You know, Mr. Benny, I can also talk." How wonderful it was for Jack to let Mel do his voices, to experiment with new ideas to make a show that much better.

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*Radio Voice Man Mel Blanc at his Pacific Palisades, CA home in Oct. 1988.*

## Hugh's Hues cont. . .

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In 1949, a program began that was to become the sixth most watched show on TV eleven years later. "Father Knows Best" premiered 25 August on NBC and continued on radio into 1954. It switched to TV, beginning in October 1954, CBS and ran until the end of the '59-'60 season. CBS ran reruns in primetime for two more years and ABC-TV for another year. Robert Young played the title role throughout.

One of my favorites began on a train leaving Wistful Vista, headed for Summerfield over NBC. Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve said goodbye to the Gildersleeve Girdle Works on 31 August 1941 and headed into his future as Water Commissioner, uncle to Leroy and Marjorie and a reputation as a ladies' man and the biggest wind-bag in town. With lead and supporting part changes, it ran to 1958, 17 years.

August's august facts: Will Rogers & Wiley Post perished in an Alaska plane crash on 15 August 1935; In August 1923, the #1 song was "Yes, We Have No Bananas" and in New Jersey, August 1904, the first speeding ticket was issued and the driver was jailed for five days!

"I'm goin' back to the wagon, boys. These shoes are killin' me!"

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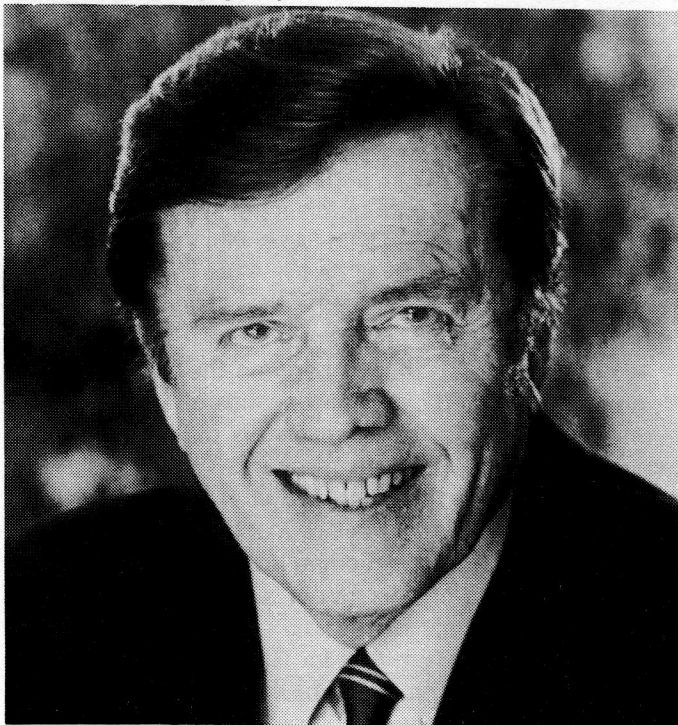
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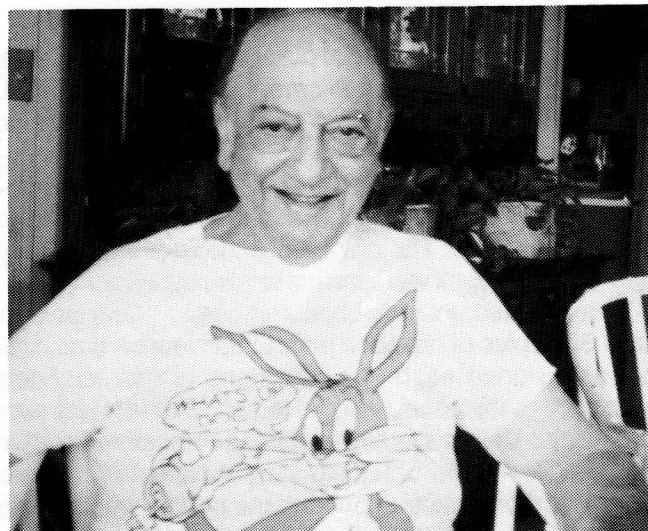
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## Hugh's Hues cont. . .

MBS, and ended on NBC, 2 January 1959, 23 years later. One 14 August 1933, over WLW, Cincinnati, came "Ma Perkins." She was Oxydol's "mother of the air." Three months later, the show was moved to Chicago and NBC for coast-to-coast broadcasting. In 1942 it was sold to CBS and ran on both networks for the next six years. At one point, it was broadcast in Europe by Radio Luxembourg and was heard in Canada and Hawaii. Ma was played by Virginia Payne who was 23 years old when the show began and 50 when it ended. She played Ma the entire time it aired. 27 years. Along with "Just Plan Bill", "Ma" was one of the top Hummert daytime productions. I remember hearing "Ma" at home during the summers in the 30's. She always had a nice, easy word for everyone.

In 1949, a program began that was to become the sixth most watched show on TV eleven years later. "Father Knows Best" premiered 25 August on NBC and continued on radio into 1954. It switched to TV, beginning in October 1954, CBS and ran until the end of the '59-'60 season. CBS ran reruns in primetime for two more years and ABC-TV for another year. Robert Young played the title role throughout.

One of my favorites began on a train leaving Wistful Vista, headed for Summerfield over NBC. Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve said goodbye to the Gildersleeve Girdle Works on 31 August 1941 and headed into his future as Water Commissioner, uncle to Leroy and Marjorie and a reputation as a ladies' man and the biggest wind-bag in town. With lead and supporting part changes, it ran to 1958, 17 years.

August's august facts: Will Rogers & Wiley Post perished in an Alaska plane crash on 15 August 1935; In August 1923, the #1 song was "Yes, We Have No Bananas" and in New Jersey, August 1904, the first speeding ticket was issued and the driver was jailed for five days!

"I'm goin' back to the wagon, boys. These shoes are killin' me!"

Mel Blanc shares a special place with SPERDVAC. As you know, he wrote his autobiography, **THAT'S NOT ALL FOLKS!**, which was published last year. As convention time approached, I was working on the possibility of having Mel appear on my Meet The Authors panel, in conjunction with his new book. Unfortunately his schedule would not permit it. The day before the convention Larry Gassman and myself were invited to his house for an informal interview tied into his book and career. Only able to secure 30 copies of his book prior to convention time, Mel graciously signed each one. Portions of that interview were played at my panel, so I like to think that Mel was with us that day. Before we left him, I commented to him not only how wonderful his life story was, but the tribute he presented of a radio's past and the people who worked with him to make it what it was. He loved radio, and was happy to share part of its story with you.

As long as we can enjoy a laconic train conductor, a tired old Maxwell, an exasperated violin teacher, a department store salesman, a sarcastic parrot, Cy from Tijuana, and more, we will always have Mel Blanc. That's All Folks? Don't you believe it! In a world that cries for more laughter, I'll take a sarcastic rabbit or an egotistical duck any time. Won't you? Yes, 1000 voices and as many memories. Thanks Mel, for all of it and more. May your star shine forever.

#### **BEN WRIGHT - A TRUE GENTLEMAN**

Upon the passing of Ben Wright, on 2 July 1989, a friend made this observation: "Ben was one of the last of the true English gentlemen in the Edwardian sense of the word, with an accent on the gentle." How true, and how fortunate we were in April 1984 when Ben Wright paid us a visit to share with us his work in radio. A distinguished actor, who studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, he brought his skills and talent to America just after World War II where he served with distinction.



*Radio Actor Vic Perrin appeared at several SPERDVAC functions, including an **Escape** Recreation at our 1985 convention and the **Gunsmoke** recreation at last year's convention.*

We enjoyed his work because of the wonderful characterizations he put into each role. As a specialist in dialects, he was most comfortable playing roles as varied as German officers to Orientals. He could play leading or supporting roles, and he did in a fifteen year period that included such perennial favorites as **Gunsmoke**, **Escape**, **Suspense**, **Romance**, **Have Gun Will Travel**, **The CBS Radio Workshop**, and in starring roles **Pursuit** (as Inspector Peter Black of Scotland Yard) and **Sherlock Holmes**, during its final season.

Continuing a tradition started by Basil Rathbone ten years earlier, Ben Wright portrayed the world-renowned detective on ABC for the 1949-50 season. As most of you are now aware, a series of new SHERLOCK HOLMES radio shows are being released nationally on an album by 221 "A" Baker Street Associates, and on cassette by Simon & Schuster. In new introductions especially prepared for this series, Mr. Wright is your host as you enter the world of fog-shrouded and mysterious London of the last century. This series is as fine a tribute to the talents of this distinguished artist as you would want to hear.

#### **VIC PERRIN - AN ACTOR'S ACTOR**

Back in the 1970's, as SPERDVAC was becoming more established, it was a dream of mine to reunite as many of the character actors that made the CBS Hollywood dramatic programs such a pleasure to hear. In SPERDVAC, sometimes dreams can come true, and it did at our August 1982 meeting. It was standing room only, but what a thrill to meet Virginia Gregg, Peggy Webber, Parley Baer, John Dehner, Harry Bartell, and Vic Perrin, reminisce about those great days at CBS.

Since the time of that meeting, many of these guests have worked hard for SPERDVAC on special occasions, such as our convention re-creations. With the passing of Vic Perrin 4 July 1989, we have truly lost a friend who gave so much of himself in each role he tackled. At two conventions, he gave outstanding performances in an **ESCAPE** re-creation and a **GUNSMOKE** production, which by the way, he originally wrote.

Born in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, Vic hitchhiked to Hollywood after graduation from the University of Wisconsin in 1940. He entered radio as an announcer on NBC, and later moved over to ABC when the Red and Blue networks split.

As a member of Charles Laughton's Repertory Group, he discovered acting and appeared as a character actor, supporting part or lead in truly some of the finest programs ever presented on radio: **Dragnet**, **Pete Kelly's Blues**, **One Man's Family** (as Ross Farnsworth), **Fort Laramie** (as Sgt. Gorce in his finest supporting role), **Gunsmoke**, **Yours Truly**, **Johnny Dollar**, **Frontier Gentleman**, **Suspense**, **Escape**, **The CBS Radio Workshop**, **Romance**, **Luke Slough**, and **Clyde Beatty** (as star).

Do I have a favorite? No, I have MANY! A few top examples would be **Escape**, **"The Scarlet Plague"** (How would you like to be the last man on earth?), **CBS Radio Workshop's "Brave New World"** (He portrayed the savage brought back to London with convic-

*Cont. next page*



tion and stoic dignity in perhaps his finest single role), any **Gunsmoke** (His roles were mostly villainous, but superb characterizations), and finally **Fort Laramie**, as Sgt. Gorce. (Listen to the feeling he brings to the part of a 20 years Army veteran, experiencing the frustrations and little glory experienced by those who served then).

Vic's finest work was no doubt brought out by producer-director Norman McDonnell. That CBS stock company of the 1950's performed superbly when the critics said that radio was now dead. They were not listening! If they were, they would have heard a group of true professionals who brought radio drama to its highest form of excellence. Vic Perrin was in integral part of that, and we salute him for what he gave to radio and left to us.

### JIM BACKUS -

#### RICH AND REWARDING ROLES

When we lost Jim Backus on 3 July 1989, I reflected how playing one type of role so well, for so long, in three different media over a 45 year period, could be so rewarding for him. We remember him from radio as Hubert Updike II, from cartoons as Quincy MaGoo, the nearsighted tycoon, and from TV as Thurston Hall III on Gilligan's Island.

His other radio work, both comedic and dramatic, has been overlooked due to his filmed work, but it was marvelous nonetheless.

Born in Bratenahl, Ohio, near Cleveland, he entered radio as an announcer over WTAM. Arriving in New York in 1941, he entered dramatic radio, and met his future wife Henny. He performed on **The Columbia Workshop**, **The Man Behind The Gun**, and other programs generally all uncredited. His big break came as Hubert Updike II on **The Alan Young Show**, which was a summer replacement for Eddie Cantor in 1944. The show caught on, especially Backus' part, and it stayed on the air. When Backus got a movie contract, the show moved to Hollywood. It was during this time that Backus landed parts on other shows as a character actor, mostly comedy, and mostly unbilled. We heard him on **The Jack Benny Show**, **The Edgar Bergen Show**, **The Sad Sack**, **The Danny Kay Show**, **Richard Diamond**, **This is Your FBI**, and **Suspense**.

He never was a leading man in films, but his roles were memorable, such as portraying James Dean's dad in **Rebel Without a Cause**. Besides his acting talents, he was an accomplished author who wrote four books about his life in show business (and sadly, about his affliction with Parkinson's Disease). Two of them, **ROCKS ON THE ROOF** (1958) and **FORGIVE US OUR DIGRESSIONS** (1988), go into his radio days, especially the first title.

Eventually he got his own show, naturally called **The Jim Backus Show**, which aired in 1947 and was co-written by Jim with wife Henny. For you trivia buffs, Jim was Bob Hope's guest on his last show in 1955.

It would have been great to have the Backus' join us, in conjunction with their last book, but unfortunately, this will not be. Perhaps we can best remember Jim Backus for the wealth of roles he left us in all mediums of entertainment, to be enjoyed by all ages.

*Continued on back page*



Send your wants in OTR-related material to McGee's Closet, % Barbara J. Watkins, PO Box 561, South Pasadena, CA 91030

McGee's Closet is a free service for members and subscribers who wish to buy, sell or trade radio-related items. Others should contact (213)947-9800 for information on placing paid ads. This column is intended for private party use only. If have items for sale commercially, you are welcome to purchase d space. SPERDVAC policy prohibits ads for the unauthorized sale of radio programs. All ads for McGee's closet should be sent to McGee's Closet, Barbara J. Watkins, PO Box 561, South Pasadena, CA 91031. Please include membership or subscriber number.

**Wanted:** Has anyone copies of COUNTY FAIR (mid-40's,CBS)? Will trade from my collection. Also would like to hear from OTR collectors interested in trading on the east coast. Contact: Greg Seltzer, R.F.D. 2, Richmond, NH 03470

**Wanted:** QUEEN FOR A DAY weekday radio shows. contact: Howard Lewis, 132 Hutchin Hill Road, Shady, NY 12409.

**Wanted:** I am looking for episodes of THE LIFEBOY SHOW starring Al Jolson. The show was aired 1936-1939. I am particularly interested in shows that featured Martha Raye. Contact: William Coombs, 43-B Rich Street, Waltham, MA 02154, (617)894-7748 or (617)271-8198.

**Wanted:** Jean Shepard WOR monologue broadcasts from 1950's and 1960's and Paul Harvey's THE REST OF THE STORY broadcasts. Contact: Richard J. Biunno, 5 Potter Place, Milltown, NJ 08850, (201)846-2225.

**Wanted:** SUSPENSE, INNER SANCTUM, THE CREAKING DOOR, BURNS AND ALLEN, and MY FAVORITE HUSBAND (starring Lucille Ball). I have some 2100 hours of old time radio on both cassette and reel-to-reel. also have a catalog I will send out. Really want SUSPENSE episodes "Dime a Dance", "The Ten Grand", and "The Red-headed Lady" (all with Lucille Ball). I love Lucy and I'm sure many will miss her. Can anybody help me find those SUSPENSE shows? Anybody want to be a radio pen pal? Contact: A.M. Delgado, 2206 26th Street, Sacramento, CA 95818.

**For Sale:** High speed cassette duplicator, Pentagon C1A. May be interested in selling entire collection OTR. Contact: Pat Atkins, 210 E. Klondike Drive, Yukon, OK 73099, (405)350-2234.

**Wanted:** I am looking for pre-1982 broadcasts of A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION, prefer open reel format. Contact: Barbara J. Watkins, P.O. Box 561, South Pasadena, CA 91031.

# RADIO IN REVIEW

By Chris Lembesis

Hello again! A note passed by member Owens Pome-roy informs me of a title that goes into an area not discussed much by most authors writing about the Golden Days of Radio. **RADIO IN THE TELEVISION AGE** by Peter Fornatale & Joshua Mills (Overlook Press 1980) discusses how the three networks got their seed money to develop TV in its early years. They used the profits from their network radio shows. In other words, radio financed its own funeral by using its profits to build TV stations and purchase equipment! I am not too familiar with this work, perhaps you may want to check it out. Their address: Lewis Hollow Rd., Woodstock, NY 12498. If any of you have titles to share please write and tell us.

One of the pleasures of our monthly gatherings are finding out not only what our guests did during those great days of radio, but what they are doing today, indeed if they are still in show business. (Sadly, more are passing on as you will note in this issue.) Many still are, including Honorary Member Bill Idelson, Rush, of VIC AND SADE, who has just written a book about his present profession, TV writing. It is called **WRITING FOR DOUGH: ADVENTURES OF A TV COMEDY WRITER**. We find out what it takes to write and how to go about it. Plotting, ideas, partners, getting a break and other areas are discussed. Included are three complete scripts of: **GET SMART**, **THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW**, and **THE TWILIGHT ZONE**. Order directly from the publisher at: Author's Unlimited, 3330 Barham Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90068, \$10.95.

**EVERYTHING BASEBALL**. James Mote, Prentice Hall Press, 1989, \$14.95, softbound. (Gulf + Western Building. One Gulf + Western Plaza. New York, NY 10023)

Here is a different and fascinating look at our national pastime. If you want past and present players, statistics values of baseball cards, or commentary on some of the problems facing the game, then this book is NOT for you. But if you want a work that covers baseball as it relates to American art and life, then this is one that you will enjoy reading and referring to from time to time.

This is a detailed look at baseball and how it was adapted to film, songs, novels, plays, poems, paintings, sculptures, comic strips, cartoons, TV, and, yes, radio. The author is a member of SPERDVAC and does quite a good job of compiling and presenting this wealth of information.

## SPERDVAC MEETING SCHEDULE

*Regular Meetings: 12:00 NOON*

12 August, Thousand Oaks Library

16 September, Buena Park Library

14 October, Western Federal, Studio City

December, no meeting planned

*Convention: 10,11 November, Viscount Hotel, LA*  
Thousand Oaks Library located at  
1401 E. Janss Rd., Thousand Oaks

Radio rates not one, but two chapters. A thorough bibliography and a selected guide to sources and dealers makes up the balance of this work. SPERDVAC is kindly acknowledged for its contributions to baseball related OTR for these chapters with a tip of the hat to Larry & John Gassman, Barbara Watkins, Tom Price and Andrew Love.

**BASEBALL IN RADIO** takes a look at every known show aired. This can range from dramatic to comedy to musical plays. Even if baseball was only a part of the program, it is included. The information presented includes, when known: the title of the play, air date, name of series (if from one), network, length, writer(s), director, producer, cast, library holding the original recording, a description of the show, and presented alphabetically. The next chapter, **Baseball In Documentary and Miscellaneous Radio** looks into radio first.

For you sports buffs who want everything of the Grand Old Game from OTR, here is a great book to start you quest. Programs ranging from **LUX RADIO THEATER** to **JACK BENNY** to **X MINUS ONE** had baseball as a theme for that particular show. Fascinating and highly recommended.

**THE SOAP OPERA EVOLUTION: America's Enduring Romance With Daytime Drama**. Marilyn Matelski, McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988, \$20.95, Clothbound. (Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640).

Here is a look at the perennial daytime serial, as it evolved from radio to TV. Reading it, one gets the impression of two different subjects, though really just one - the daytime serial in radio and, separately for TV. The author shows us the transition, but I find it too brief, in relation to the book's title. Concerning the radio soap operas, we get a background of the plots of the various shows, audience growth and loyalty, how and why they were rated, and a brief comparison between the radio and TV daytime serials.

When the author goes into detail on the TV soaps, there her work shines, and there lies the problem with the book. From TV, we find a detailed study of these shows, including family trees, a synopsis of trends, viewer analysis surveys, charts, and so on. But we do not have this amount of research and detail for the radio counterparts. Perhaps it should have been more evenly balanced, but then the author perhaps wanted to emphasize TV more. Author should have included photos of the stars and/or casts of shows from both mediums.

One wishes more radio material were included, but happily, author acknowledges two classic studies, and discusses them: **RADIO RESEARCH: 1942-1943**, and **SPEAKING OF SOAP OPERAS**. Overall an interesting work, written at a scholarly level, and a unique study.

Here's a question for you! How do you take a break from all this reading and reviewing, especially now that summer is here and you want to get away from it all? If you are a member of SPERDVAC, you might attend the **BIG-D SUPER COLLECTIBLES SHOW** in Dallas, Texas, on July 21st thru the 23rd. I'll be there to see what is available in radio related reading matter, past and present. And

*Cont. next page. . .*



# Radio in Review cont. . .

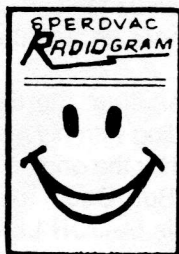
radio related reading matter, past and present. And guess what? I'll write about it. Oh well, it's only a working vacation anyway!

Before I close, my thanks to Marty Kallenberger for serving us as Radiogram Editor this past year. It has been a pleasure working with him and look forward to the same with our new editor. Once again, refer to your last Radiogram if you are interested in some of the books I have reviewed. They are generally discounted for SPERDVAC members.

Next month I get technical again. There seems to be a recent influx of new titles about how to locate, restore, and collect the old radios, both wood and plastic. I will have a roundup of these new titles for you. Until then, as always, Good Luck and Good Reading!

## SPERDVAC

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*We are so grateful to the many Friends of SPERDVAC who have contributed \$50 or more to help defray costs of the society. The above members have donated funds during the past year.*

# RADIO SCRIPTS DONATED TO SPERDVAC

By Dan Haefe

SPERDVAC's volunteers could spend the next two years organizing recent donations of radio broadcast scripts for our printed materials library. We have received numerous scripts which must be sorted, copied and prepared for addition to our collection of radio print memorabilia.

The family of performers Celeste Rush and Lou Merrill has donated a collection of an estimated 3000 scripts plus other radio-related items, including scrap books and sound effects equipment. Miss Rush left acting around 1941 to pursue a career in radio writing and drama coaching. She and her husband, actor Lou Merrill, collected multiple copies of scripts from cast members for use in drama classes.

The Merrill-Rush collection includes many of the popular 1940's - 50's dramas. There are scripts of **Johnny Dollar, The Whistler, Suspense, Escape, Richard Diamond - Private Detective, Crime Classics** and many others.

A number of these scripts are out of order or have pages missing. SPERDVAC volunteers are needed to go through groups of scripts, organize the pages and make notations of missing pages before they can be copied, cataloged and added to the printed materials library. We are using the services of volunteers residing outside Southern California for this project.

The Lou Merrill-Celeste Rush collection is an unusual lesson in American radio history because some sets of scripts include those used by each performer and the sound effects staff. Viewing a specific set, an observer can see how each cast member marked his or her own role(s), made changes in wording or cuts in dialog (usually dictated by the director during the read-through) plus occasional notes and even drawings.

Some unusual pieces of radio trivia we have already noted during a quick review of the donation are: Writers Morton Fine and David Friedkin entertained the cast of **Crime Club** by using amusing phrases in place of the word "by" when listing their credits on the cover pages of their humorously titled stories for the 1953-54 CBS series.

For example, the script cover sheet for their story "Ali Pasha, A Turkish Delight" is credited "as muzzimumed by Morton Fine and David Friedkin." Another story, "The Hangman and William Palmer: Who Won?" retains the credit "as refereed by. . ." and the series' final broadcast, "Good Evening, My Name is Jack the Ripper," is "on a bias by those two fellows well-fixed for blades."

So far we have located 26 of the 51 **Crime Classics** scripts and look forward to obtaining the entire series, as well as additional recordings, if possible.

Another piece of radio trivia is connected to a program added to SPERDVAC's General Library about two years ago. Included in the programs lent us by the Wilbur Hatch family was the original audition of **Yours Truly, Johnny**

*Cont. next page. . .*

# BILL STERN - THE GREATEST MYTH MAKER OF THEM ALL

by Michael Bryson

*In view of the fact that there are a number of Bill Stern Colgate Sports Newsreel programs in the SPERDVAC libraries, I'm sending you the enclosed story for possible publication in the RADIOGRAM.*

*The information comes from a book that I compiled, edited and rewrote, "The Babe Didn't Point," which was recently published by the Iowa State University Press. The book deals in part with sports myths, and one of the myths involves the Stern program, the most popular sports program in radio history.*

*I remember listening to Bill Stern's program when I was a child, so I was surprised to discover during my research on the book that most of his stories were pure concoctions.*

*From "The Babe Didn't Point," Published by The Iowa State University Press, copyright 1989 by Michael G. Bryson. Reprinted with permission.*

NOTE: The most successful sports program in radio history was "The Colgate Sports Newsreel," conducted weekly by Bill Stern from September 1939 to June 1951. the program always opened with a catchy little ditty sung by a quartet:

*Bill Stern the Colgate shave-cream man is on the air.  
Bill Stern the Colgate shave-cream man with stories rare.  
Take his advice and you'll look nice.  
Your face will feel as cool as ice  
With Colgate Rapid shaving cream.*

Then Stern would open the program with a rapid-fire pitch: "Good evening ladies and gentlemen. . . This is Bill Stern bringing you the 500th edition of the Colgate shave-cream Sports Newsreel. . . featuring strange and fantastic stories. . . some legend, some hearsay. . . but all so interesting that we'd like to pass them to you!"

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*Continued from page 9*

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Dollar, performed in December 1948. (See General Library reel 1032.) The cast copies of the script indicate the main character was named Lloyd London (as in Lloyds of London) but sometime after the script was duplicated, a decision was made to rename the silver dollar tipping detective Johnny Dollar.

SPERDVAC has completed reproductions of the Antony Ellis script collection lent to SPERDVAC by Jan Ellis O'Hare. In addition to including these scripts in our printed materials library, we will add recordings of some of these same broadcasts to our tape library.

Last month, former CBS sound effects man Ross Murray gave SPERDVAC scripts of 25 shows he wrote, mostly for **Suspense, On Stage, Romance** and **The Whistler**. We are in the process of preparing these for addition to the printed materials library, too.

There was one major catch with Stern's stories, as the following excerpt from "The Babe Didn't Point" (published by The Iowa State University Press) reveals.

Bill Stern was once considered the dean of American sportscasters. Unfortunately, that urgent, distinctive theatrical voice of his spun some of the biggest sports lies ever told.

It will take historians a hundred years to expunge the myths Stern created from 1939 to 1951 in his "Sports Newsreel" show.

His audience rating was among the highest in network radio. Bill used the suspense method to tell the wondrous deeds of some young athlete, keeping the identity a secret until the punch line: "And that man was. . ."

Here would come the name of any celebrity from Einstein to Eisenhower.

Stern never let a fact stand in the way of a dramatic climax. He wrenched history out of shape to fit his script.

Those closely associated with sports all have their favorite Stern myth, and this is one of the favorites:

When Abraham Lincoln lay dying, Stern related, he sent for General Abner Doubleday, the man who was supposed to have invented baseball.

And the president's last words were addressed to the general: "Keep baseball alive. In the trying days ahead, the country will need it."

Aside from the facts that Lincoln never recovered consciousness after he was shot, and that Doubleday was nowhere around the death scene, the story is absolutely true.

Another Stern story had a youngster in Cincinnati pleading with his father to be allowed to sign a contract offered by the original Cincinnati Red Stockings of that city.

"But, Dad," the youth told his disapproving parent, "this is MAJOR LEAGUE baseball!" and that man was. . . William Howard Taft.

The Red Stockings did not sign their players to contracts. There was no such thing as a major league then. . . and when the club disbanded in November of 1870, Taft was only thirteen years old.

Stern loved to use the names of presidents as climatic stringers. He said William McKinley (who didn't know a bat from a pogo stick) passed up a pro baseball opportunity to go into politics.

Thomas Edison's deafness, said Stern, was the result of being hit in the head by a pitch when he was a semi-pro player--which he never was.

He once told how Grantland Rice saw a young fighter get knocked out, then heard him singing in the shower afterward. Rice, according to Stern, advised the young man to give up boxing and make singing his profession.

And that man was. . . Frank Sinatra. It was one of the few times the easy-going Rice blew his stack.

In later life, Stern defended his outlandish whoppers, which gave him a salary of nearly \$2,000 a week. He said his stories were--in his words--"strictly entertainment and being such was one in which I was entitled to unlimited dramatic license."



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*The Passing Parade*

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Actor **George Coulouris**, noted for his radio work with Orson Wells, died April 26. . . Announcer/newsperson **Charles Arlington** died May 23. he was employed as a newscaster at KMPC, Los Angeles at the time of his death. . . Radio musician **Johnny Green**, 80, died May 18. . . Detroit radio actor-writer-director **Tom Dougall** died May 17 at age 80. He created "Challenge of the Yukon," later renamed "sergeant Preston of the Yukon," for WXYZ radio. . . Radio/television personality **Fran Allison** died June 13. . . Radio quizmaster of 1930's-40's **Bob Hawk** died July 5.

—Cont. from Page 7 - SPERDVAC Mourns Loss. —

### POSTSCRIPT ON LYN MURRAY

On a final note, I wish to thank Jane Calvin, Executor for the Lyn Murray Estate, of an invitation to a reception she extended to the friends and associates of Lyn. I am very pleased to pass on an event we should all look forward to. The last project Lyn was working on was a musical version of Norman Corwin's **The Plot To Overthrow Christmas**, to be seen on TV hopefully this holiday season. The score, about half complete at the time of his death, was in the Offenbach style with a contemporary edge. Two noted composers, Albert Sengrey and Scott Harper, will complete this work. This should be a wonderful event to be seen by all and to appreciate the artistry this talented man left for us to enjoy.