



RADIO RECALL

Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club

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WE OFFER YOU. . . *ESCAPE!*

By Stewart Wright © 2011

Radio has often been called "The Theatre of the Mind." Few series from the Golden Age of Radio rivaled *Escape* in the ability to combine acting, scripts, music, direction, and sound effects to transport the audience anywhere in the world, or, in some cases, out of this world, and place them in the middle of impossible situations. What other anthology series could have listeners cornered by a deadly Bushmaster snake on a cruise ship in Tropical waters on one show, "A Shipment of Mute Fate" and the next week, in "Action" have them hanging by their fingertips on the sheer face of an ice cliff in the Alps?

Them Schedule Changes

Escape was the wandering vagabond of CBS series during its seven-year, 228 episode run. The series aired on every day of the week and in a total

of ten different time slots. It is little wonder that, with all these scheduling changes, that *Escape* had trouble attracting sponsors, developing strong ratings, and a loyal audience. During its entire run, the series only had a single significant period of sponsorship, four months in 1950 by the Richfield Oil Corporation.

Sunday was the most common day of airing with 103 *Escape* episodes being broadcast on that day; Saturday and Wednesday were the next most common broadcast days with 27 episodes each. *Escape* generally aired relatively late in the evening with 183 episodes starting at 9:00 PM or later. (All times used in this article are Eastern Time Zone.)

Quite frequently, runs of *Escape* were short. Several times the series was a Summer replacement. There were long gaps, ranging from a few months to one of over a year between the various portions of the series' run. Only once did *Escape* remain on the air for an entire year in the same time slot: Sundays at 9:30 PM Eastern Time from 10/12/1952 to 10/04/1953.

The Opening and . . . The Voice

Escape hooked the audience from its unique opening, which had gradually evolved over time into an anonymous Voice (which became known as The Voice of *Escape*) that was soothing, but at the same time somehow menacing and dangerous that asked some seemingly innocuous questions:

"Tired of the everyday routine?

Ever dream of a life of romantic adventure?

Want to get away from it all?"

Followed by the announcer dramatically stating:

"We offer you. . . *Escape!**Escape!* . . . designed to free you from the four walls of Today for a half hour of High Adventure."



BILL CONRAD

(illustrations by Bobb Lynes)

**WANT TO
GET AWAY
FROM IT
ALL ?**

RADIO RECALL, a journal of the MWOTRC, is published the first week of all even-numbered months. Respective deadlines for all submissions are the 20th day of odd-numbered months. Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor; enclose a SASE if reply desired. Opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of MWOTRC. Permission to reprint given upon request, author permitting. MWOTRC may be contacted through its business address, P.O. Box 2533, Fairfax, VA 22031, or by contacting any of the below listed representatives.

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MWOTRC was created in 1984 by Jim Burnette (1945-2001), our President Emeritus. Annual dues \$20 to locals and \$ 15 to others, and seniors. Regular meetings are held at Trinity Episcopal Church, Columbia Pike and Wayne St, Arlington, VA the 2nd Friday evening of every month, except Jun and Dec, when meetings are held Saturday noon at a local restaurant TBA.

UPCOMING OTR EVENTS



September 17-18, 2011 **Annual Tom Mix & Western Heritage Festival**

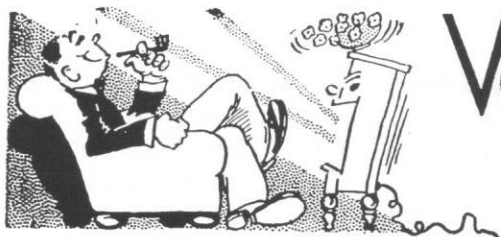
Downtown Dewey, OK. Tom Mix movies, look-alike contest, plus visit to Tom Mix Museum and the jail where Tom put the bad guys when he was town marshall there in 1912. Festival starts out the first day with a cattle drive of longhorns right through the town. Every Straight-Shooter has got to see this once. For more info go to <tommix@cableone.net>

September 21-24, 2011 **6th Annual Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention**

Marriott Hotel, 245 Shawan Road, Hunt Valley, MD 21031. A stellar lineup of guests, beginning with Patty Duke and Karen Valentine plus several Radio, TV, and Movie stars. Dozens of nostalgia dealers including our own Fred Berney of Satellite Media Productions. Panels and seminars on old-time radio, movie serials, cartoons, etc. Thrill to presentations by prominent experts like Maury Cagle on "The History of Buck Rogers" and Jack French on "Sky Gals: Lady Aviators in Real Life and Popular Fiction." More info at <www.midatlanticnostalgiaconvention.com>

October 20-23, 2011 **36th (and last) Friends of Old Time Radio Convention**

Ramada Plaza Hotel, Newark International Airport, NJ. This remarkable and beloved OTR convention is coming to an end this year so don't miss it! Dozen s of radio veterans will be our guests, including both Bobby Bensons (Ivan Cury and Clive Rice), plus Richard Herd, Arthur Anderson, Will Hutchins, Elaine Hyman, Joe Franklin, Peg Lynch, Rosemary Rice, and many more. There will be presentations on Walter Winchell, CBS westerns, radio bloopers, broadcasting comedians, OTR historians, Big Bands, etc. Among the re-creations will be episodes from Gunsmoke, My Favorite Husband, Lights Out, Radio Goes to War, among others. Details, admission, and rates at www.fotr.net or email <JayHick@aol.com>



Voice of the Listener



Dear Mr. French,

Our library inadvertently discarded the booklet you wrote for the Radio Spirits CD set of *Frontier Gentleman*. Could you please send me another copy and I'll insure it is properly archived. Reading your club's web site has convinced me to join so I've sent my check to Mike Taylor.

Prof. Bob Stepno
Radford University, VA

Dear Jack,

What a fine article Mr. Kandrach created on the DeMarco sisters...great research and well written. The tradition of great original articles is still going strong with contributions of Kandrach and other MWOTRC members.

Ken Neal
Kerrville, TX

Dear Editor,

Can you point me in the right direction in finding out the worth of a Hallicrafters RBK-16 receiver? I appreciate your time and assistance.

Cheryl Jacqueline
Maryland

Dear Jack,

Your June issue...as usual, a GREAT newsletter. My dues check is in the mail, literally.

Ron Sayles
Milwaukee, WI

Dear Mr. French

As you know, my dad, Jim Shean, was the main writer on the Bobby Benson radio show. Since his death, I've been inventorying all his scripts, which fill three drawers in a large file cabinet. Most of them are from the 1948-50 era. I wanted you to know how much joy you brought him by writing about his role in this juvenile western series.

Rick Shean
Brea, CA

Dear Jack,

FOTR is winding down and it is sad, but at age 88 and a half, I don't know if I could keep up my former schedule at Newark anyway. Alice and I enjoy RADIO RECALL, always so professional and entertaining, and we send you our very best.

Arthur Anderson
New York, NY

Dear Editor,

Thanks for dues reminder. I'm sending mine in now. I always enjoy reading RADIO RECALL. When I finish each issue, I forward it to an old friend of mine as well.

Mahlon Wagner
Liverpool, NY

Dear Jack,

I've enclosed clippings from our live OTR event in Front Royal. It was a great success and we raised \$ 4,500 for the local Humane Society.

Don Richards
Front Royal, VA

Dear Editor,

Enclosed is one dollar for a copy of the one-page article on *Jerry of the Circus* written by Ken Piletic, which appeared in your August 2001 issue. I am doing research on this series and that piece will assist me. I found the citation of this article through an Internet search.

Mrs. Sara Long
Elkins, WV

Dear Jack,

Thanks for putting me in touch with Michael Henry of the Library of American Broadcasting. I'm donating the radio and TV scripts of programs I was in years ago. The L.A.B. was most cordial to me.

Shirley Eggleston Haner
Brookfield, CT

All letters must be signed, but name withheld if originator so specifies. Letters may be edited for brevity, but original opinion will not be altered. All requesters are urged to provide us with both a postal address and their email address. This is our policy since many potential responders do not have Internet access. However, if writers decline, their requests are still published.

The Voice then returned to pull the listener into that night's episode such as in the 1953 production of "Wild Jack Rhett":

"You are standing in a moonlit street of a Western cow town. . . alone and friendless. While moving slowly down on You. . . their horses crowding every exit, is a band of killers. . . each one of whom has been paid to shoot You dead."

When combined with the music, it made for an opening which was most memorable.

While The Voice of *Escape* was performed by many actors, it was most frequently and memorably done by two actors: William Conrad and Paul Frees. Their voices seem to add just the right qualities of menace, danger, and adventure.

The Stories

Escape featured a superb mix of adaptations of novels and short stories and original scripts. The adaptations were done by some of radio's finest writers. Later, some of these adaptors and other writers would pen original stories for the series.

The initial run of the series, 07/07/1947 - 08/18/1947, featured adaptations of classic and contemporary fiction that set the standard for quality scripts that would be a hallmark of *Escape*. Four of the episodes were Les Crutchfield adaptations of classic stories by: Rudyard Kipling - "The Man Who Would Be King", Joseph Conrad - "Typhoon", Robert Louis Stevenson - "Sire de Maletroit's Door", and Arthur Conan Doyle - "The Ring of Thoth".

The other three episodes were adaptations of more recent fiction: "Operation Fleur De Lys" by Stewart Alsop & Thomas Bradon (adapted by William N. Robson), "The Diamond As Big As The Ritz" by F. Scott Fitzgerald (adapted by Les Crutchfield), and "The Fourth Man" by John Russell (adapted by Irving Ravetch.)

Through the end of 1949 the stories aired on *Escape* were almost exclusively adaptations of classic and contemporary fiction. Adaptations would remain a staple during the series' entire run. Three radio classic adaptations had their first airings on the series: "Leiningen Versus the Ants", "A Shipment of Mute Fate", and "Three Skeleton Key" would terrify and captivate audiences and would be reprised on *Escape* and other series. Adaptations of many genres of literature were aired on *Escape*.

Here are just a few examples:

SCIENCE FICTION - "The Time Machine", "Mars Is Heaven" and "The Outer Limit";

HORROR - "The Fall of the House of Usher", "Ancient Sorceries", and "Snake Doctor";

WESTERN - "Command" and "Wild Jack Rhett";

ESPIONAGE - "The Great Impersonation" and "Confidential Agent";

CRIME - "When the Man Comes, Follow Him" and "Crossing Paris".

Starting in 1950, original radio plays began to

air on *Escape* and they too would run a wide range of genres. Some of these original plays were "The Man from Tomorrow" by Irving Reis, "Sundown" by Joel Murcott, "The Sure Thing" by John and Gwen Bagni, "North of Polaris" by Charles Smith, "Train from Oebisfelde" by Ross Murray, "Violent Night" by Les Crutchfield, "Pressure" by Richard Chandlee, and "The Island" by Millard Kaufman. Several of these original radio plays would be reproduced on other series.

Script Re-Use

During its network run, 28 scripts were reused



on *Escape*. Each reuse was a new production and not simply a repeat broadcast of earlier aired episodes. These new productions usually had some rewritten dialog and included new cast and crew members. These initial script uses and subsequent reuses accounted for a total of 64 episodes.

One script, "A Shipment of Mute Fate", was used four times on the series with a different actor playing the lead role in each production: Jack Webb (10/15/1947), Harry Bartell (3/28/1948), John Lund (3/13/1949), and David Ellis (7/7/1950.)

Six scripts were used three times: "The Country of the Blind", "Evening Primrose", "The Fourth Man", "Leiningen Versus the Ants", "Three Skeleton Key", and "The Diamond As Big As The Ritz". The productions of the latter script was unusual in that the lead role of John Unger was played by brothers: Jack Edwards on 7/21/1947 and Sam Edwards on 8/29/1948 and 3/27/1949.

The quality of the scripts used on *Escape* was confirmed by the later reuse of many of them on other series. Twenty-nine *Escape* scripts were subsequently produced on *Suspense*. The following are a few examples. Classic *Escape* scripts "A Shipment of Mute Fate", "Three Skeleton Key", "Country of the Blind", and

"Leiningen Versus The Ants" were later used on that series. Director William N. Robson adapted an Ambrose Bierce short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", for *Escape* in 1947 and later reused the adaptation three times while he served as the director of *Suspense*.

Actor John Dehner penned two scripts: "The Man With The Steel Teeth" and "Lily and the Colonel", that were initially produced on *Escape* by director Antony Ellis and later reused by Ellis when he directed *Suspense*. Script alterations were made in the series openings and closings, and dialog, cast and crew changes were made.

The Herb Purdum script "Macao" was first produced on *Escape* on 07/18/1951 and approximately a year later was produced on *Romance* as "The Red Angel". For the *Romance* production, Purdum made significant changes to the final act.

Antony Ellis also reused some *Escape* scripts on the various series he directed. When he was the director of *Suspense*, he reused some scripts from the time period when he wrote for and directed *Escape*: "The Game", "A Study In Wax", and "Classified Secret". Ellis also wrote "The Cave" which was used on at least three series: first *Escape*, then *Suspense*, and finally *Romance*. When "The Cave" was produced on the latter two series, Ellis was also the series director.

Missing Episodes: Real and Imagined

All but a handful of *Escape* episodes are in circulation. Those episodes that are not in circulation are "The Run of the Yellow Mail", "The Primitive", "The Blue Wall", "The Big Sponge", "Transport to Terror", "Pagosa", "Nightmare In The Sun", "Dangerous Man", "The Blue Hotel", and "One-Eighth Apache".

There were several stories that were announced on *Escape* as upcoming episodes, but were never broadcast. Most of these shows had proceeded in the production process as far as a draft script, however there is no indication that any of these shows were ever cast, rehearsed, or recorded. These shows are: "The Haunted Man", "The Canterville Ghost", "Grand Canyon Suite", and "Mute Witness".

And now. . . , we offer you . . . new information about an episode that never was part of *Escape*. Often reputed to be a lost *Escape* episode, "Your Grandfather's Necktie", is commonly listed in *Escape* logs as a special broadcast that either aired on 08/26/1950 or 08/31/1950. Research in 2008 by the article author has determined that "Your Grandfather's Necktie" was not an *Escape* episode, but was actually an episode of the series *Stars Over Hollywood* which aired on August 26, 1950 and starred Alan Young. This information was verified by consulting the original *Escape* scripts, director Norman Macdonnell's personal papers, and period Radio Programs Listing Sections from the New York

Times and several other newspapers.

The Players

While *Escape* did not frequently feature big-name stars, the series did possess an outstanding "company" of regular performers. Its "company" included many of the finest West Coast vocal talent such as Parley Baer, Joan Banks, Michael Ann Barrett, Tony Barrett, Edgar Barrier, Harry Bartell, Jeanne Bates, Herb Butterfield, Lillian Buyeff, William Conrad, Hans Conried, Jeff Corey, Ted de Corsia, Don Diamond, Lawrence Dobkin, Paul Dubov, Sam Edwards, Georgia Ellis, Paul Frees, Will Geer, Virginia Gregg, Wilms Herbert, Ramsey Hill, Vivi Janiss, Bill Johnstone, Joseph Kearns, Berry Kroeger, Lou Krugman, Jack Kruschen,



Peter Leeds, Frank Lovejoy, Charles Lung, Jeanette Nolan, Jay Novello, Vic Perrin, Barney Phillips, Luis Van Rooten, Jack Webb, Peggy Webber, Ben Wright, and Barton Yarborough.

Over the years I have been fortunate to hear many actors talk about the Golden Age of Radio and their favorite series. Several of those actors mentioned *Escape* as one of the series on which they most enjoyed performing.

Perhaps Harry Bartell best summed up how actors felt about the series. In a 1998 interview Harry shared his feelings with me about *Escape*, "The scripts were wonderful, many of them were based on Classics that stood the test of time. They offered me, as an actor, parts that I never would have gotten on any other program. They were exciting, fun to do and very rewarding from a performance standpoint."

(To be continued in next issue)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stewart Wright is an vintage radio researcher and historian in Colorado. He has written extensively on many Old-Time Radio and Contemporary Radio series. He has also researched and compiled several series broadcast logs that can be found at: <http://www.old-time.com/otrlogs2/index.html>

NEW BOOKS



The Whistler

Stepping Into The Shadows

A Columbia Film Series

By Dan Van Neste

BearManor Media, 421 pp., \$24.95

Reviewed by Maury Cagle

The first thing that should be noted about this book is that it is not about The Whistler radio program, but rather about the series of eight "B" movies of the 1940's based on the OTR series. However, one of the opening chapters covers the radio series, which ran from 1942 to 1955, noting the writers, casts and overall subject matter. It's worth noting that The Whistler movies ran concurrently for four years of the radio show's 13 years.

These movies fall squarely in the film noir category, maintaining the sense of foreboding and impending doom that marked the radio Whistler. Even the eerie, 13-note introductory whistle, done live each week on radio by Dorothy Roberts, was carried over into the movies.

The titles in the series were:

- The Whistler (1944)
- The Mark of the Whistler (1944)
- The Power of the Whistler (1945)
- Voice of the Whistler (1945)
- Mysterious Intruder (1946)
- The Secret of the Whistler (1946)
- The Thirteenth Hour (1947)
- The Return of the Whistler (1948)

Each movie is the subject of a chapter, with production notes, credits, cast, and a fulsome plot summary, as well as a number of photographs. Contemporary reviews of each film are included,

along with a section of interesting facts and trivia.

Seven of the eight movies (all except The Return of the Whistler) starred Richard Dix, born Ernest Carleton Brimmer in 1893 in St. Paul, Minnesota.

A talented actor, his career spanned the transition from silent to sound films, nearly 100 in all. He received an Academy Award nomination for his role as Yancy Cravat in the 1931 epic, Cimarron.

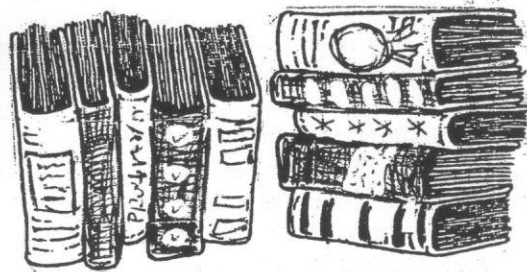
One of his acting strengths was his ability to adapt to almost any role. Among his many roles were a gangster who reforms, a Yankee officer spying behind Confederate lines; a boozy riverboat captain fighting a Chinese bandit, and a pilot forced by financial woes to fly dangerous stunts. His on and off screen personality gained him many friends in the movie industry, as he made a habit of helping struggling young actors and craftsmen. Dix died September 21, 1949, of heart problems. Actor Michael Duane played the title role in the last of the Whistler films, The Return of the Whistler. The book features a foreword by Robert Dix, Richard's son.

A large section of the book is called The Whistler Family Album, with 2-3 page bios of 31 men and women who starred alongside Dix. Most are undeservedly forgotten, while a few had long careers. The list includes some striking and talented women, such as Lenore Aubert, Pamela Blake, Leslie Brooks, Janis Carter, Lynn Merrick, and Gloria Stuart (who died last year at age 100). Men who worked in the Whistler films included Jerry Mason, Trevor Bardette, John Calvert, Alan Dinehart, J. Carrol Naish, and Regis Toomey.

Similar sections deal with Whistler creator J. Donald Wilson, who not only conceived the radio character, but wrote the first in the series of movies. Others cover directors, producers, writers, and craftsmen who worked on the series.

While the Whistler movies were conceived as "B" fillers for double features, one critic has said that the films were often better than the lead feature on the bill.

Even though the book has a narrow focus, it is exhaustively researched and well written, and is a good read. Dan Van Neste deserves credit for



putting the spotlight on a mostly-forgotten series of movies that perhaps should be classified as "B+." Several titles in the series have appeared recently on Turner Classic Movies.

This book is available from BearManor Media at www.bearmanormedia.com.



The Shadow

The History and Mystery of the Radio Program: 1930-1954

BY MARTIN GRAMS, JR.

OTR Publishing, 2011, 850 pp..

Reviewed by Rob Farr

Martin Grams Jr., one of our most prolific chroniclers of 20th Century broadcasting, has recently published this magnum opus. It is fitting that it takes the better part of 1000 pages to tell The Shadow's story, since for many people the iconic character is synonymous with the Golden Age of Radio itself. *The Shadow's* broadcasting history spans the entirety of the golden era of radio drama, and Grams' book is an in-depth look every aspect of the program's and the character's many incarnations.

Readers of this journal need no introduction to Margo Lane and Lamont Cranston, who "knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men" with his hypnotic ability to "cloud men's minds". But it is hard to imagine that anyone picking up Grams' book will not learn some new and fascinating factoid with each perusal. Even the identity of the first writer of The Shadow stories for Street & Smith Publications began in controversy.

But of course credit belongs to Walter Brown Gibson, who created the character in 1928 and two years later helped launched the radio program on CBS under the title *Detective Story Magazine Hour*. Gibson devoted his prodigious energies to writing Shadow stories for Detective Story and later, The Shadow Magazine (compilations of which are still in print), but left the scripting and direction of the radio series to other hands.

At first, the Shadow was little more than a spooky narrator. But when Orson Welles came on board in 1937, the sleuth became the central protagonist. Welles is certainly the best-known of the Shadows, but in fact did little more than show up at the studio to read the scripts sight unseen. Welles' sheer talent hid the fact that he was learning The Shadow's fate right along with the listeners. Future Shadows were Bill Johnstone (1938-1944), John Archer (just the 1944-45 season) and the longest-running Shadow, Bret Morrison (1945-1954). There were many sponsors (including the inevitable "sustaining" near the end), but best-

remembered is the D.L. & W. Coal Company, aka Blue Coal.

Grams also looks at the many Shadow tie-ins, such as the Columbia film serial and the Monogram B-features (who other than Grams could dig out the nugget that the first film Shadow, Victory Jory, was young Bret Morrison's roommate at the Pasadena Playhouse). And he doesn't neglect the television pilots, even though The Shadow was never to find a slot on prime-time network TV.

The book is divided into a comprehensive history, an episode guide and various appendices, covering such sundry topics as the South American and Australian versions of the show.



A few words about the author: Martin Grams has made a name for himself as a historian who thoroughly researches his subject matter, resulting in books that are destined to become the last word on OTR programs such as *The Green Hornet*, *Cavalcade of America* and *Suspense*, not to mention the TV shows *Car 54, Where Are You?* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. He is also well-known to East Coast Golden Age OTR, movie and TV aficionados as the founder and guiding presence of the Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention held annually in Maryland.

For Shadow and OTR fans, this tome will be one of the two indispensable volumes on the subject. Because it was co-written by Shadow creator Walter Gibson, *The Shadow Scrapbook* (Harvest/HBJ, 1979) will remain the "bible" for many fans. But for a detailed, accurate, incisive history of The Shadow radio show and movies, it is hard to believe that there will ever be a better source than Martin Grams' definitive book.

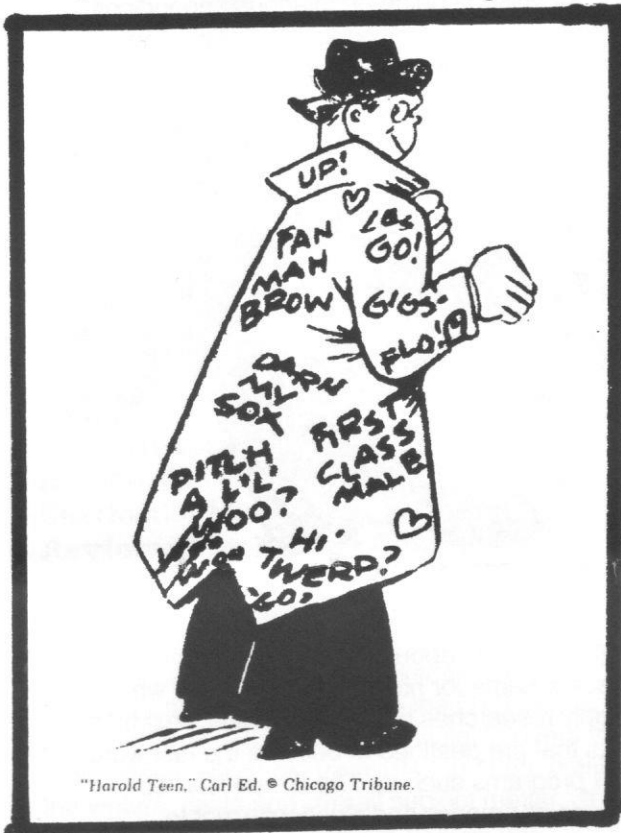
THE SHADOW KNOWS!



The Radio Lives of Harold Teen: 1930 to 1950

by Ryan Ellett © 2011

Radio programs featuring teenage protagonists are represented in the collections of many old time radio enthusiasts by episodes of *Archie Andrews* and *Meet Corliss Archer*, both of which debuted in 1943. However, thirteen years before these well-known programs hit the airwaves *Harold Teen*, possibly the first of such teen-themed series, entertained listeners in the Chicago area.



Premiering as a Sundays-only comic strip on May 4, 1919, in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Love Life of Harold Teen* became the first such effort to reflect the life of the era's teenagers according to Carl Ed, the strip's writer and drawer. The idea for *Harold Teen* actually came from Joseph Patterson, co-publisher of the *Tribune* who felt that a comic featuring teenage characters would be popular with readers. Not long after its debut the comic proved popular enough to become a daily feature beginning September 25, 1919, in the *New York Daily News*, also owned by Patterson. Eleven years later as radio was rapidly capturing the public's imagination, Chicago's WGN adapted *Harold Teen* for the airwaves, thus becoming one of several *Tribune* comics which would be turned into radio features.

The show, entitled simply *Harold Teen*, debuted in June of 1930 featuring a quintet of Chicago-area actors, at least one of whom would become very prominent in the industry. Playing the lead role of Harold Teen was Willard Farnum, a

graduate of suburban Northwestern University where he starred in school productions. Fellow Northwestern alum Eunice Yanke played Lillums Lovewell, Harold's girlfriend. Jack Spencer portrayed the football-playing jock, Beezie Binks.

Filling out the group of fun-loving teens were Lilacs and Giggles, played by Wally Colbath and Ireene Wicker respectively. Wicker also played the part of Harold's little sister, Josie, whenever the character was written into the story. Late in the program's run Ruth Dennen assumed the part of the new girl, Cicely, in May, 1932, and around that time Gayle Hinton joined the cast in an unknown role.

Lead Willard Farnum went on to a successful radio career through the 1930s which included stints on *Dan Harding's Wife*, *Flying Time*, *Midstream*, *A Tale of Today*, *Way Down Home*, *Today's Children*, and *Woman in White*. Eunice Yanke, the top-billed female character, had a short radio career, appearing in addition to *Harold Teen* only in WGN's *The Silver Thread*, a mystery-adventure which followed two sisters but ran for just a few weeks in late 1932. Ireene Wicker, the most famous alum of the original *Harold Teen*, is widely remembered among the old time radio community for her long-running role as *The Story Lady*.

Jack Spencer had a minor radio career compared to Farnum and Wicker but one certainly worth noting. *Harold Teen* was by far his longest aural job but he is also documented with appearances on *Easy Aces* in early 1932, just a few months after the Goodmans had relocated from Kansas City. That summer Spencer toured the Chicago region as a member of the WGN Minstrels which also included Hal Gilles, formerly of Louie's Hungry Five, and a young Marlin Hurt. In 1933, after *Harold Teen* had left the air, Spencer hosted a thrice-weekly *Railway Inn*, his last known radio work before moving to Hollywood sometime in the mid-1930s.

Wally Colbath is remembered for this athleticism more than his acting skills. He was a national intercollegiate diving champion at Northwestern in 1928, 1929, and 1930 and a member of the 1928 and 1932 United States Olympic teams, earning a bronze medal in 1928. He eventually got into warehousing and moved to Indianapolis after World War II. His son, Walter Colbath, Jr., erroneously indicated his father was the first to play *Jack Armstrong*; this may be an incorrect family memory that actually refers to the elder Colbath's time on *Harold Teen*.

Ruth Dennen was known more for her singing abilities than her acting and is documented to have sang around Chicago for many years. This

series is her only known radio work. Gayle Hinton, who was a latecomer to *Harold Teen*, had earlier attended the University of Wisconsin. In November, 1932, she married and she and her husband relocated to Peoria, IL, presumably ending any radio aspirations she may have held.

Harold Teen was broadcast for a quarter-hour Monday through Saturday at 6:45 (later 6:15 then 5:15) and penned by Blair Walliser, a Northwestern graduate, Phi Beta Kappa member, and writer of WGN material since the summer of 1929. In college Walliser honed his writing skills in local humor magazines *Purple Parrot* and *The Scrawl*. His first writing work for WGN involved a series of scripts for Sunday afternoon children's concerts. Walliser also took at least one acting role on *Harold Teen*, the part of Simile Jones, an African American female hired by Pop Jenks, proprietor of the teen hangout the Sugar Bowl. Later in the decade Walliser worked on *Backstage Wife*, *Curtain Time*, *Front Page Farrell*, *Jungle Jim*, and *Romance of Helen Trent*, primarily as director.

Like the comic strip, the live action series revolved around the timeless travails of adolescence, and were often centered at the Sugar Bowl, a popular hangout run by Mortimer "Pop" Jenks. Aimed at teenage listeners, "Pop" Jenks provided a voice for adult listeners who happened to tune in. *Harold Teen* was, perhaps, one of the first radio efforts to make liberal use of popular teen slang of the day, or "highschoolie slang" as writer Walliser good-naturedly called it. It wasn't all jokes; In June, 1932, the series introduced Philip Space, a character who was both deaf and mute and worked as a clerk at the Sugar Bowl.

On March 17, 1932, the cast of *Harold Teen* celebrated their 500th broadcast after 21 months on the air. Not long afterward writer Walliser was promoted to production manager at the station and began to oversee the productions of Goodman Ace's *Easy Aces* and Bob Becker's outdoors programs, both of which were picked up by the CBS network. The pioneering teen series left WGN in June, 1932, to make way for the station's coverage of the presidential conventions. In the meantime, Farnum and Yanke headed to California to take screen tests for possible motion picture work. Though the station indicated *Harold Teen* would be back on the air after the summer's political events wound down, the popular comic strip of the air did not return.

At least, it did not return immediately. Nearly a decade later WGN brought *Harold Teen* and his gang of friends back to the airwaves in 1941. Once again Blair Walliser directed and he may very well have been the impetus behind the revival. The new cast was entirely different: the lead role of Harold Teen was given to Eddie Firestone while his girlfriend Lillums was played by Loretta

Poynton, who, apocryphally got into radio by accident when she mistakenly entered a studio during an audition and had a script thrust into her hands. Bill Evenson was cast as Lilacs and Marvin Mueller as Beezie. Teen's pal Shadow Smart was portrayed by Bob Jellison while Gail Henshaw and Willard Waterman were picked as Harold's parents. The audition was put on before 600 Chicago land high school students at 3:45 on March 14, 1941.



An ad for the 1941 series

The audition didn't fly and Walliser went back to work polishing the concept. On July 29 WGN tried again and *Harold Teen* was on the air as a half-hour Tuesday night feature (7:30 – 8:00). This time Charles Flynn earned the title role in the Horlick's Malted Milk-sponsored broadcast. Said Walliser of any actor who would play Teen: "The actor who plays Harold must have just the right kind of voice and a personality which he could inject into the part to give it smoothness and naturalness. When his voice reaches the listeners, they must immediately have a picture of a young lad of 17, the typical American youth who is full of fun, gets into a lot of trouble, and is not sure what to do about it all." Flynn had already received important parts on the serial *Bachelor's Children* while his mother, Bess Flynn, had written for WGN for several years.

The rest of the cast carried over from the March audition with Jellison, Poynton, Waterman, Henshaw, and Mueller being joined by 11-year-old Rosemary Garbell as Josie, Harold's sister, and Beryl Vaughan as one of Harold's beau's, Cynthia. The writing chores were handled by Fred Kress. The premier episode featured a well-worn story; Harold finds himself trying to escort two girls to the same dance without the two being aware of each other.

In a story line from August, 1941, by which time *Harold Teen* was heard over the Mutual Broadcasting System, Harold and his friends

attempted to make some movies. Over several weeks Harold worked to raise money for his project and he finally found success when the local police department agreed to fund one picture in exchange for the opportunity to show it at their annual benefit dance. While filming the mystery thriller in an authentic haunted house, hi-jinx ensued when a gang of bank robbers decided to hide out in the same house.

Harold Teen

Radio's flaming youth, his lamb's lettuce, and the rest of the Sugar Bowl gang are a sure antidote for that "old" feeling.

6:15 P. M.

Judy Ton, a Columbus, OH, transplant, joined the cast of *Harold Teen* in October, 1941. On her debut broadcast she played both a housewife and an African-American maid. On December 21, 1941, the cast of *Harold Teen* appeared on WGN's *Citizens of Tomorrow* program which normally showcased local high school students. Bob Jellison, *Harold Teen*'s Shadow Smart, also had a regular role on *Citizens*. This second dramatized version of *Harold Teen* left the air in January, 1942, a much shorter run than the

original series but more widely heard.

Radio was not done with *Harold Teen*; WGN brought the character back in March, 1948, on a program called *Swinging at the Sugar Bowl*. This new disc jockey series, aired at 12:30 on Saturdays, featured Fred Reynolds as Harold Teen and occasional guests such as Frances Langford, John Hall, and Lena Horne. Reynolds was a Middletown, CT, native and record enthusiast who had a collection numbering upwards of 5,000 albums. Choosing the *Harold Teen* moniker was not happenstance; he married the daughter of *Harold Teen* creator Carl Ed. *Harold Teen*'s platter-spinning days lasted into January, 1950, but Reynolds continued to pen a regular column for the Tribune called "Platter Chatter" into 1956. He later worked for RCA Victor.

Carl Ed died October 10, 1959, just two weeks after retiring from cartooning. The family soon announced that after the final strips Ed had penned were run, the 40-year-old strip would come to an end. *Harold Teen* left the newspapers in November, 1959. While collections of the long-running comic strip have been published over the years, no recordings of any of the three *Harold Teen* radio series are known to be in circulation among old time radio fans. In addition to three radio versions over a span of nearly twenty years, *Harold Teen* was the star of two motion pictures, the first in 1928 with Arthur Lake as Harold and the second in 1934 with Hal LeRoy in the lead.

LIVE OTR EVENT PROVES TO BE LARGE SUCCESS

MWOTRC member Don Richards sent us clippings from *The Valley Scene* newspaper which covered his annual "Radio Mystery Theater." This charity event was organized to raise money for the Humane Society of Warren County, VA. In the past eleven years that it has been held, different charities have been recipients of the funds raised.

Its usual format features, live on stage, recreations with manual sound effects, programs from the Golden Age of Radio. This year's event, held at the Holiday Inn in Front Royal, had its talented cast performing the comedy *The Bickersons* and two horror programs, "Cat Wife" and "Fugue in C Minor."

Don rehearses his cast and sound crew once a week for a month prior to their performance. He is a long time resident of Warren County and brings a vast range of broadcasting experience to these endeavors. He was a radio and TV newscaster for decades in the Washington, DC area and became the top anchor for WTOP-TV, succeeding Walter Cronkite at that station. Since then, he's been the "voiceover" for countless advertising campaigns throughout the U.S.

This yearly fund-raiser included a full buffet dinner, catered by Houlihan's, in addition to the live show. We're pleased to report that this year's event attracted a sellout crowd of 150 and grossed \$ 7,500, of which the entire profit of \$ 4,500 went to the Humane Society. The society's director, Carol Ann Fox, was very grateful for the large donation. She said the funds would be used to pay for their expenses, including animal food, veterinary bills, and utilities, including electricity.

Don and his fellow actors, Glenn White, Betsy Blauvelt, Susan O'Kelly, John Schreiner, Jacob Goodman, Jeff Schwartz and Sally Anderson, plus sound effects man, Danny Goodman, have every reason to be proud of their success.

(March 1944)

10

KAY KYSER

WITH—
HARRY BABBIT
GEORGIA CARROLL

Entertain Tonight From
Another Service Camp

Tonight
9:00
WKY

COLLECTOR IN SEARCH OF RARE VINTAGE SHADOW ITEMS

One of the prominent buyers in the U.S. of rare vintage Shadow collectibles from the 1930's and 40's is offering top prices for such items. Dwight Fuhro is interested in purchasing any radio or pulp collectibles relating to The Shadow.

He is interested in all types of such related merchandise, including advertising signs, displays, premiums, original paintings and art, and sheet music. If you have anything in these categories for sale, or you know someone who has, contact Mr. Fuhro. (He is also willing to pay a finder's fee for such referrals.)

Both Martin Grams, Jr. and Karl Schadow, who know him personally, vouch for his integrity. For more details, check out his web site at:

www.theshadow.ca

You can email him at <dwightfu@yahoo.com> or phone him at (306) 545-5460.

SCOTT PAPER COMPANY WAS A RADIO ADVERTISING PIONEER

We'd miss a lot here in MWOTRC were it not for the sharp eye of our Florida librarian, Melanie Aultman. She recently spotted in the October 1934 issue of "Advertising & Marketing Magazine" this little nugget of OTR history. That month marked the very first time that toilet paper was advertised on network radio.

Network officials and federal authorities finally bowed to the requests of Scott Paper Company and permitted bathroom tissue commercials to be aired. These 1934 ads were relatively bland, starting with a door bell sound, followed by the announcer saying:

"Good evening, Madam. This week you'll find Scott Tissues and Waldorf Toilet Tissues selling as 'Thrift Week Specials' It's well worth while to take advantage of this. So order several rolls todaytomorrow sure."



from the EDITOR'S DESK

email: jfrench@mwotrc.com



We have good news and bad news. The bad news is that, regarding the membership contest to write an original OTR article for RADIO RECALL with the winner getting a copy of John Dunning's classic *Tune In Yesterday*, we received not one entry....nada, zip, zilch.

The good news is that some of our regular contributors took up the slack so we did not have to send out 12 blank pages in August. Ryan Ellett submitted a wonderful article on *Harold Teen* and Stewart Wright, a dear friend, sent me a great piece on *Escape*, which will be published as a two-part article. Plus we have book reviews from two guys we can always count on...Rob Farr and Maury Cagle. Thanks guys!

Two important and very enjoyable OTR functions are coming up in fall and you'll find details on page 2. The annual MidAtlantic Nostalgia Convention is in September and features tributes to radio and TV programs as well as film, pulp magazines, etc. It's close by so don't miss it.

The 36th and last Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention in Newark will be held in late October. As always it will have a host of veteran OTR guest

performers, fascinating panels, and exciting recreations. All of us who have attended in the past urge you to come for this last one.

For those *Gunsmoke* fans, including John Heilmann, we can assure you that the series is not forgotten in present-day Dodge City, Kansas. The convention bureau of that western cow town has as its motto: "Get the heck INTO Dodge." *True West Magazine* recently named Dodge City as a Top Ten True Western Town. Here you can see Boot Hill, the Dodge House Hotel, and the Gunfighters' Wax Museum. The Boot Hill Museum has the largest gun collection in the west and visitors there are entertained by Miss Kitty and her dancing girls. More info: <www.visitdodgecity.org>

Trivia Time: The first kids show on radio was in 1921 on Station WJZ in Newark, NJ. It was called "The Man in the Moon" and novelist Josephine Lawrence wrote the scripts.

Coming up in next issue: the conclusion of Stewart Wright's article on *Escape* plus OTR historian Jim Cox returns. This time he takes on the fascinating topic of all those mythical hometowns populated by radio's soap opera characters.

[illegible]

FIRST CLASS

Radio Recall



"I was never so happy before!"



said one amazed listener when she heard the answer to her own problem on radio's "My True Story". "My True Story" is helping thousands of people find the way to happiness because it presents *real-life* dramas of real people and their problems—direct from the files of True Story Magazine. Here you'll find vividly portrayed stories dealing with love, hope, fear, jealousy and many others.

TUNE IN

MY TRUE STORY

AMERICAN BROADCASTING STATIONS

(Dec ember 1951)