

Radio Recall

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Metropolitan Washington Old Time Radio Club

www.mwotrc.com

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To Protect and Preserve

Club Members Take Part In RPTF Meeting

By KARL SCHADOW

In promoting the grand era of Golden Age Radio, members of the Metropolitan Washington Old-Time Radio Club are involved in a diverse array of club functions, ranging from monthly meetings, participating in old-time radio conventions, maintaining a presence on the worldwide web and recreating live performances of shows that no longer exist as audio recordings.

One of the more academic endeavors in which members have been immersed is the Radio Preservation Task Force (RPTF). The group assembled for a third time recently at the Library of Congress (LOC). During the meeting, club members Martin Grams, Jill Ahrold Bailey, Rob Bamberger, Rob Farr and Karl Schadow participated in various sessions. A recap of their experiences follows.

RPTF was created in 2014 by the National Radio Preservation Board, which was itself started as a provision of the National Recording Preservation Act of 2000 by Congress. As outlined on the organization's website, the RPTF facilitates the preservation of, research on, and educational uses of radio recordings held by archiving institutions and private collectors in the United States. During the past several years, conferences have convened in the Washington, D.C., area, bringing together individuals from academia, along with archivists, collectors and historians.

Most of the conference was devoted to librarian and archivist issues and concerns about digitizing and preserving audio, but Matt Barton, a curator of the LOC, moderated a panel with the title of "Older-Time Radio," a twist on the usual old-time

radio theme, discussing how the preservation of vintage recordings applies to research needs of various kinds.

MWOTRC members participating in the session included, among others, Martin Grams, Jill Ahrold Bailey and Rob Bamberger.

Martin has authored more than 40 OTR books, including a history of *The Lone Ranger* – the focus of his presentation. His take-home message was, "Each of us, in our own way, does a form of preservation, even if we are not working directly with archival recordings."

Jill, co-producer of *The Big Broadcast*, heard on WAMU each Sunday night at 7 p.m., gave an overview of the program's history from its start in the 1960s when the show's creator, John Hickman, was host. She and the program's current co-producer and host, Murray Horwitz, strive to preserve old-time radio by featuring both well-known and unusual recordings during their regular public radio broadcasts. They feel their goal is to entertain existing fans and introduce new listeners to the art form.

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Radio program producer Jill Ahrold Bailey responds to a question from Matt Barton, Recorded Sound Section curator at the Library of Congress.

– Photos courtesy of Sammy Jones

Of note is that Jill cited a syndicated series which was written by her grandmother during the 1940s, *The Adventures of Jane Arden*. It was based on the Jane Arden newspaper comic strip.

Rob Bamberger's presentation concerned appearances on radio by guitarist/singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe and trumpeter Bunny Berigan. He said that in the case of Rosetta Tharpe, recordings have revealed more about the non-gospel portion of her performing life.

As for Berigan, the development of his iconic solo on Tommy Dorsey's studio recording of "Marie" can be traced because the band was appearing weekly on the *The Jack Pearl Show*. The band performed "Marie" twice on the program in January 1937 before recording the tune at the end of the month. Additionally, it was noted that Dorsey, to this point, was playing more jazz on the radio show than he had been recording for the Victor label.

In short, the survival of the broadcast recordings broadens the dimension of our understanding about performers and can even tell us of "works-in-progress." Rob's overall point was that what is revealed in musical performances captured on radio in the 1930s and '40s is just one more powerful argument for preservation.



Martin Grams explains his use of OTR recordings in researching the history of *The Lone Ranger*.

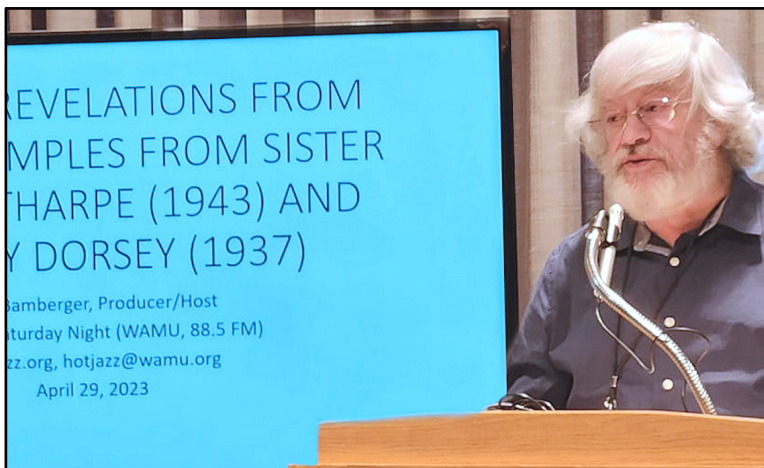
Rob Farr sat in on "Radio Recordings, Documentation and Broadcast Historiography." He was most impressed by Kathy Fuller-Seeley's information about the preservation of the *Jack Benny Program* series, and tangentially, her search for "lost" Benny scripts for which no recordings were made.

During the conference, Rob was excited to hear from NPR producers known as The Kitchen Sisters and about such programs as *Lost and Found Sound*. Rob called the

conference unique, with its blend of radio professionals, academics and collectors, and hoped it is repeated at least every two years.

Karl Schadow chaired the session Rob Farr

enjoyed so much. Other presentations dealt with automation related to advertising and research methodology, and Alex Russo discussed air checks and issues of copyright, the subject of a separate session delving into the matters of rights holders, fair use and access to various collections.



Ron Bamberger, producer and host of *Hot Jazz Saturday Night* on WAMU, at a conference session on "Older-Time Radio, told of research for his program based on old radio show recordings.

Work by the RPTF continues daily. To keep abreast of its activities (and become involved), check out the website radiopreservation.org. RPTF is always seeking new ideas and participants. It is unknown when the next conference will take place, but attendance is free, open to all those seeking to preserve the medium.



At MWOTRC Meetings

August – Part Two of Frank Morgan's review of "Don Ameche – On the Radio"

September – Club will meet at the Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention in Maryland.

October – Presentation by Karl Schadow, "Weird Tales on the Air."

November – John Abbott discusses a 1947 script titled "The Double Eye," followed by a re-creation of the show that might not have been recorded or broadcast.

December – Winter luncheon – details to come.

In Passing ...

Remembering John Dunning

By BOB COCKRUM

As so many such announcements, it was jaw-dropping, an attention-getter during an otherwise ordinary morning. At age 81, John Dunning had died.

John, a patron saint to the world of old-time radio fandom, succumbed to dementia as a result of a brain tumor on May 23. The tumor, itself benign, was partially removed in 2006, but that was followed by the loss of one eye and progressive neurological problems, as mentioned in his biography on the [Old Algonquin Books website](#). Details of his life are also in an interview carried on [BookBrowse.com](#).

For followers of radio's shows of the 1930s through the early 1960s, he will forever be remembered for his, "Tune in Yesterday" (1976) and its huge (822 pages, 3-pounds, 12-ounces) progeny in 1998, "On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio."

"I admired him so much," Bill Owen told me. "Frank Buxton and I provided a skeleton of old-time radio, and John fleshed it out in great detail. Such a loss." Owen and Buxton had published "Radio's Golden Age" and "The Big Broadcast" in 1966 and 1972.

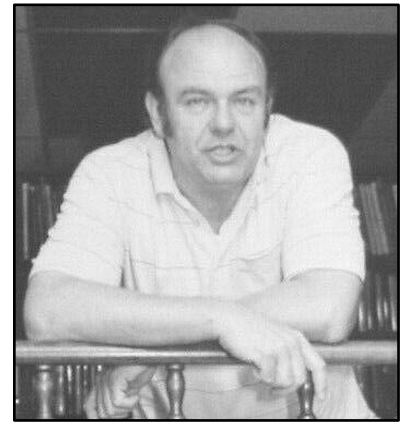
I was a passing acquaintance of John's in the 1970s when I was a reporter at UPI in Denver. Being of a certain age now, I don't recall if I had read a newspaper story about him or if he was interviewed on a radio talk show, but there he was – a fellow fan of OTR. I got in touch.

I remember when he first came to my apartment – tall and not overly large for his frame, but wearing what struck me as a tiny hat for the size of his head, much like the one Dallas Cowboy's Coach Tom Landry wore, something with a high crown and a small brim. I assumed that in John's case, he had thinning hair or was already bald, though it could have been his affectation as a newspaper reporter – even if it was a little dated in the 1970s.

We traded shows – a dozen or so – on tape, plus he dubbed some shows that I had on Radiola records. John was particular. Tapes of shows from Radio Yesteryear were expensive on my salary, so when the company offered several packaged shows (vs. a "custom order"), I went for them. The tapes would start with an announcer's booming voice in reverb, "The following is a Radio Yesteryear Special Feature," and sometimes it would be over part of the first show's opening theme. John didn't want anything to do with those – they had to be clean and complete openings. So it was that I built my collection more

affordably by recording the OTR featured on his radio show.

We lift a glass in your honor, John ... because lifting your magnum opus "Encyclopedia" is more than we can manage.



John Dunning in 1992

– AP Photo

By JOE WEBB

"Tune in Yesterday" (TiY) transformed our hobby for younger collectors who had never heard any programs until we found the hobby. We mainly relied on dealer catalogs to get an idea of what to hear. It was Dunning's book that helped many of us past the "ol' standards" of *The Shadow*, *Jack Benny*, *The Lone Ranger* and others that were commonly popular.

It was Dunning who led our ears to so many other series, giving us background and intrigue, capturing our interest and making us dedicated enthusiasts, not casual fans. He made us ready to try the really good and sometimes overlooked or underappreciated programs.

It was said there was another two-thirds of material that had to be cut from the book, and much of it ended up in "The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio," a more detailed endeavor, also held in high regard. By then, however, there was an established hobby with clubs, conventions, newsletters. It did not have the seminal effect of TiY, which had turned the hobby from hearsay and rumors into a more substantive endeavor. Young collectors shared a knowledgeable mentor in John Dunning.

And it was Dunning who encouraged the efforts of the Denver area's legendary Radio Historical Association of Colorado through serious collecting activity with his broadcasts, especially all the interviews of radio stars, supporting actors and production pros. A key interview was with Roberta Bailey Goodwin, Bob Bailey's daughter, who discussed his acting career but also how the family fell apart because of his turmoil at the end of the radio era. It was easy to forget that performers had families and, sometimes, challenging times.

TiY shaped the listening preferences and collecting aspirations of multiple generations of collectors. The hobby would not have been as enjoyable and inspiring without his important contributions to it. Thank you, John. Rest in peace.

THE STORY OF MARTIN HORRELL AND HIS

GRAND CENTRAL STATION!



Storyteller Martin Horrell, born in Chicago in the 1890s of Russian immigrants, was quite the observer of how others told their stories. He crafted his own narratives as a young man by contributing pieces to the Chicago Tribune. Also in those lean days, he performed in vaudeville, in nightclubs and in the silent films of Chicago's Essanay movie studios. By 1930, he was in New York, where he joined an advertising agency, and as the rapidly developing thing called radio advanced, he became the agency's producer of shows for the medium.

By PATRICK LUCANIO ©2023

Martin Horrell's idea for one particular radio show was drawn from a movie, which was drawn from a German novel. It was adapted first for the stage as "Grand Hotel" in New York by William Drake in 1930, and Drake wrote the screenplay for 1932's movie of the same title, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture (without any nominations in other categories).



An online movie site summarizes "Grand Hotel" this way: A group of very different individuals staying at a luxurious hotel in Berlin deal with each of their respective dramas.

There's no record of Horrell having shouted "Eureka!" Still, here was a great premise for a radio anthology – a major setting, a kind of intersection with many people coming and going who have just as many stories to tell week after week.

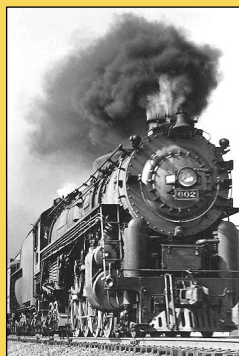
Horrell imagined a couple of possibilities – an airport or a railroad depot. Recalling his own arrival in the East, he chose the cavernous Grand Central Terminal, a decision reinforced by hearing recordings of trains and the noisy hustle of railway stations.

Horrell's show title: *Grand Central Station*, complete with a breathtaking (literally) 45-second introduction that he is said to have spent two weeks writing and matching just the right words in a rhythmic pattern with the sounds to create a feeling of excitement and anticipation. (Google: archive.org Grand Central Station to hear examples.)

The premier was Oct. 8, 1937, the beginning of a run that lasted until April 2, 1954. In order to survive this treadmill without a staff of writers, Horrell decided the program would be written by listeners – some would be professionals, some cast members, but most were amateurs. Columnists

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What's in a Name?



It was – pardon, please – a grand name for a radio program. But the purists hurried to point out that the place was really Grand Central Terminal. At least, officially.

The pedantic listeners picked at the facility being called "station," and they didn't like the portrayal of the trains in the prolonged introduction to the show – the roar of those steam locomotives on shining rails drawn by New York's magnetic force, rushing, sweeping, flashing, diving to arrive at a "gigantic stage on which are played a thousand dramas daily!"

The enormous steam engines still ran majestically countryside, but by the time Martin Horrell's program was on the airwaves, diesel electric locomotives were carrying passengers in and out of the sophisticated city, announcing their presence with horns instead of a whistle's wail.

Horrell answered the critics with a form letter that said he used the familiar robust sounds of the steam-driven behemoths for dramatic effect. As for the title of the program, Horrell conceded that "terminal" was the correct name, but that his own research showed 80 percent of New Yorkers and visitors referred to it as "station."



derided the show as being written by farmers, housewives, college students, vacuum cleaner salesmen and inmates.

Horrell admitted in a 1949 newspaper article that he had received “perfectly lousy” scripts, but even then, they sometimes contained great ideas. He paid the usual \$150 per script fee and rewrote the stories.

“I started as a freelance writer myself,” Horrell recalled, “and I know how cold and impersonal a rejection slip can be. So, if I come across anything that might conceivably make a show, I go over it again and again. I do all the rewriting and editing myself, and once the submitted script is accepted, the only other thing the author has to look forward to is the check.”

Horrell claimed he never sent a rejection slip. If a script was deemed hopeless, it was “sent back with a letter telling why it didn’t make the grade and a detailed analysis of the story with positive feedback for improvement and a request for further submissions.”

Without naming names, Horrell told radio columnist Leo Mishkin that three amateur authors became professional writers. A historical note on the [Archives West website](#) notes that Horrell gave a start to Arch Oboler, Hal Kantor and Sidney Marshall.

Script requirements sent to prospective writers outlined what the producer was looking for: romance, drama, mystery, young love, old love, or no love ... melodrama. Moreover, requirements said “drama, with theme, preferred,” with a caution that, “We dislike comedy and hate farce. You may find it helpful to read the short stories in Good House-keeping, McCall’s and Ladies’ Home Journal, but remember that to avoid talkiness, a radio play needs more incident than the average short story.”

Horror stories, to Horrell, were exactly that in terms of his needs, and he didn’t like simple-minded love stories, such as “the ones in which boy and girl bump into each other on the street with arms full of packages and then fall in love.” Still, he said, he was a pushover for a story with a heartstrings tug.

Horrell spent his Sundays perusing submissions – as few as 12 to as many as 50 each week (which was seldom). The odds of selling a script to *Grand Central Station*, he calculated, were one in 50, better than any other radio program could offer.

After selection and Horrell’s careful editing, his wife, Dorothy, read the story, as did the series’

Early Days of a Heavyweight Playwright

Emblematic of a gentle turndown by Horrell was one directed to Rod Serling in August of 1949 for what was submitted as “Winner Take Nothing,” a boxing story.



As recounted by researcher Martin Grams Jr., Horrell wrote that Serling’s script was “better than average,” but female listeners “have told us in no uncertain terms that prize fight stories aren’t what they like most.” The letter went on, “I have a feeling that the script would be far better for sight than for sound only, because in any radio presentation, the fights are not seen. Perhaps this is a baby you should try on some of the producers of television shows.”

It was only a month later that *Grand Central Station* did broadcast Serling’s “The Local Is a Very Slow Train,” under the new title of “Hop Off the Express and Grab a Local,” followed by “The Welcome Home” on Dec. 31, 1949.

As for a story about boxing, Serling (a flyweight boxer in the Army) is known for *Playhouse 90*’s “Requiem for a Heavyweight” on television in 1956, three years before the dawning of his *The Twilight Zone*.

director – Ray Kremer, Bill Rousseau and Ira Ashley through the years – for further evaluation. Following overall approval, Horrell rewrote the script to maintain program continuity and then production began.

For his performers, the producer turned to Broadway, rejecting the idea of a stock company of only radio actors and wanting different and fresh voices each week, much like the first incarnation of Lux Radio Theatre in New York in 1934. Among those making appearances on Horrell’s shows were Victor Jory, Peggy Conklin, Mady Christians, Richard Kollmar and Martha Sleeper. Alexander Scourby’s deep, resonant voice elevated multiple episodes as narrator.

Of interest is a newspaper advertisement by WGAN, Portland, Maine, that mentions the radio program and Horrell’s hiring of stage actors. The ad writes of those from “Our Lan” but does not identify anyone by name. The short-lived play on Broadway featured a predominantly black cast led by William Veasey and Muriel Smith. Did Horrell cast one of them or others to be among the rare black talents featured on radio? There is no conclusive evidence.

Almost 10 years after the debut of *Grand Central Station*, Horrell found himself caught up in a disagreement with CBS – specifically with its

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standards and practices department. That's "S&P" to those in the broadcasting business and to the rest of us (and the frustrated writers and producers) simply known as "censors." Though censorship is better applied to actions of government, a firm's S&P looks after the moral, ethical and legal ramifications of a show's content.

The drama at hand was the story of a woman's irrational fear of stairs, a fear of walking down the front steps of her home for a reason she could not explain. Enter a psychiatrist who concludes that her mental condition is a "guilt complex" about her marriage. The doctor prescribes a treatment, and the couple's stairs and other problems are solved.

Not so fast, said the CBS director of editing, who contended the field of psychiatry was somewhat hazy, and it sounded (or "read" at this point) as if the drama's dialogue was practicing just that. Why, many listeners with similar symptoms and problems might see themselves in the portrayed situation, thus creating the danger of a "positive disservice" to laypersons.

In the meantime, other media were depicting psychiatric themes: the novel "Wasteland" by Jo Sinclair; the Broadway musical and later film "Lady in the Dark" by Moss Hart; the Alfred Hitchcock film "Spellbound."

"The overall ban on psychiatric subjects is somewhat silly, especially in view of the marked success in movies and books," said Horrell.

Editing Director Gilson Gray issued his decree in a rather protracted summary that included a 61-word, one-sentence paragraph. Apparently, it was enough to make Horrell throw up his hands in surrender. Newspaper articles refer to the show as having been scheduled for a certain date in February 1947, and New York Daily News columnist Sid Shalit decided, "If you ask us, there is a vital place in radio for psychiatrists – starting right off with the censors."

Such a kerfuffle aside, along with the criticism of rather shallow stories and unrealistic dialogue, the program was not lacking for commercial support with such advertisers as Pillsbury flour, Cream of Wheat cereal, Rinso detergent, Listerine mouthwash and Toni home permanents.

Despite that success, Horrell left the program in the early 1950s. His replacement was Himan Brown, known for *The Adventures of the Thin Man*, *The Affairs of Peter Salem*, *Bulldog Drummond*, and perhaps most famously, *Inner Sanctum*

Being of another kind of sound mind ...

Horrell put great emphasis on what he called radio's "scenery" – meticulously designed sound effects done by the specialists at NBC's networks, the longest run at CBS, and its final few months on ABC in 1954.

A wire service story in 1947, referring to the work of Jim Rogan and Frank Mellow of CBS, said it was "as realistic to radio listeners as though they had seen it happen," adding that "to Martin Horrell ... radio sound effects are simply stage sets or special lighting used in the theatre to help dramatize a situation."

Horrell and Rogan held that the most familiar of sounds were not to be overlooked in making the mind's picture complete – although one tool of the trade could double or triple for many things. Rogan's peg turned in a block of wood could be interpreted as a creaking door or floor, even the tension of a schooner's rigging. Mellow created a pair of shoes with hard leather heels that he manipulated to imitate a child's steps to those of a hulking villain.

The story compared Rogan and Mellow's sound effects studio to the castaways of a secondhand store – "unrelated junk all waiting to be used."

Somewhere there's music ...

Another part of Horrell's stage dressing was the music, supplied in the late 1940s by organist Lew White, which was crucial to achieving Horrell's dramatic effect. During rehearsals White would improvise chords and passages to complete the scenes.

Horrell's wife, Dorothy, who had been a grand opera singer in Europe, provided insight into how and why music should be used to enhance mood and to emphasize plot twists. If Dorothy agreed with White's improvisations, Horrell gave an approving nod to White, and White would make note of the chord or passage on his copy of the script.

With Dorothy's experience, it is no wonder that trade publications observed that the program's musical interludes often had strong undertones of an operatic style rather than the symphonic sounds of other shows.

Mysteries and the 1970s revival of dramatic radio via the *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*.

Horrell did not leave broadcasting. With his track record, so to speak, he was ready for the growing medium of television and found a sponsor in Campbell Soup for an anthology series called *The*

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Campbell Playhouse (also known as *Campbell TV Soundstage* and *Campbell TV Playhouse*). He carried with him the procedures of his radio show – freelance writers and amateurs, too, turning out half-hour human interest stories in a soap opera vein.

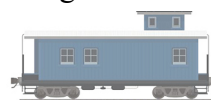
While enthusiastic about television (“radio with pictures,” as he called it) and his like of the tension that live television brought, there was trouble ahead. During the show’s run from 1952 to 1954, the NBC series earned tepid reviews and ratings, despite the brief promotional hype that could be seen in the newspaper TV schedules.

“Either the program’s budget will not permit the hiring of better writers or else the producers think they can gamble with weak scripts,” said a TV

Guide article in September of 1953, condemning the show for its “stilted emphasis on pseudo-psychological themes, pseudo-sophisticated farce and semi-suspense tales.”

Maybe it was just as well that the CBS radio censor had intervened, though for reasons other than poor writing. Friends of Horrell said that he hadn’t been happy doing television after all, admitting that he missed radio’s storytelling in the theater of the mind.

Horrell left television after the failure of his visual effort. He died at his Los Angeles home on May 28, 1957, following a long illness.



This article is adapted from the original story in the April 2023 issue of Radiogram, publication of SPERDVAC in Palo Alto, Calif. Patrick Lucanio is its editor.)

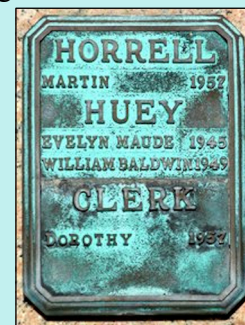
Just a few more things . . .

Some reports cite the birth of Martin Lewis Horrell as being in Chicago on Nov. 11, 1898. However, his draft registration card of June 5, 1917, lists his birth year as 1895, which would make him 61 at the time of his death in May of 1957. (The 1895 date is supported by his age reported in the U.S. Census of 1920 and of 1930, as is his being a veteran. Only in the 1950 Census did he suddenly become three years younger. The 1930 document finds him residing in New York, working for an advertising agency; he married later that year.)

Horrell was cremated the day after his death. Notices in Los Angeles and Chicago newspapers said his interment was planned for Chicago; if so, it was for less than a year – the records of Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, Calif., show Horrell’s interment there (Columbarium of Eternal Light, Niche 660) was on May 9, 1958. A plaque

bears his name and the year 1957, but that same date by the name of his widow is unexplained. Dorothy (Clerk, after she remarried) died at age 77 in October of 1977, according to the cemetery’s records.

A 1972 letter from Dorothy Clerk to the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming stated that Horrell was the valedictorian of his graduating class at Medill High School and that he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Chicago in three years, turning down seven graduate scholarships in favor of business pursuits.



The draft registration card of June 1917 also lists his job as “advertising copy writer” for Woodward’s, Inc., in Chicago. It isn’t verified, but this seems to be a reference to John G. Woodward Candy Co., headquartered in Council Bluffs, Iowa. It is unclear if he was an employee of the company or was working in an advertising agency capacity with Woodward’s as his main or only client. City directories of the era show no “Woodward’s” at the given address on Michigan Avenue.

from Frank Morgan's "First Fifteen"

The Busy World of Orson Welles, 1942 – 1943

Truth or fiction? The public story was that Orson Welles was unfit for military duty in World War II because of a bad back and flat feet. It is said the real reason was that Welles didn't want to be in the fighting forces.

He expressed a certain amount of guilt at not being in Army green or Navy blue but felt he could contribute to the war effort by doing the work he was best at in radio and film.

7:15 p. m., WJSV—Orson Welles pilots the new series of programs to be known as "Ceiling Unlimited" and dramatizing the exciting stories of American airplanes and the men who build and fly them.

— Radio schedule, Washington Post, Nov. 9, 1942

Part of that work was *Ceiling Unlimited*, described as a celebration of the world of aviation, mixing history with stories of aviation workers and pilots of that time and of their place in fighting the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan.

The 15-minute program was carried by CBS each week with Lockheed Vega as its sponsor. (Vega was a subsidiary of Lockheed, manufacturer of the high-wing monoplane Vega, known for its long range and speed.)



An Army Air Corps version of Lockheed's sturdy, streamlined and fast Vega, first produced in 1927.



Col. Arthur Ennis of the public relations division of the U.S. War Department chats with Welles about *Ceiling Unlimited*.

night after a dispute with an agency representative. The show carried on, with Thomas Freebairn-Smith as producer and director and announcer Patrick McGeehan as the narrator.

There was a summer series with author James Hilton, then a new 30-minute version premiered in August, retitled *America — Ceiling Unlimited*, featuring Joseph Cotten as host of a variety show. Lockheed Vega, Dunning wrote, was content with no commercials, just several brief mentions of its sponsorship; at this point, the company had one customer — Uncle Sam.

Hello, Americans! was a concurrent Welles project that was meant to promote inter-American understanding and good will during the war. It aired from mid-



Welles touring South America — 1942

November in 1942 through the end of January 1943, sponsored by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, headed by Nelson Rockefeller. This show also drew its cast from the Mercury Theatre troupe.

The program was an offshoot of Welles' trip to South America in 1942, where he made a film that was never released. Time magazine called the 30-minute radio program "a Cook's tour of Brazil ... lively though bumpy in spots."

The shows that followed touched on the culture of other countries, including the stories of Simón Bolívar, who led what would become six countries to independence from the Spanish Empire in the early 1800s, and an account of Montezuma, the Aztec emperor of Mexico in the 1500s.

"In his new capacity Orson Welles regards himself as public-relations man for the U.S. For the first time in his life he cannot avoid early deadlines. [Welles was known for running late or being at a studio just-in-time for a broadcast.] Army censors insist on seeing the Lockheed scripts two weeks ahead of time. Nelson Rockefeller, on the other hand, trusts Welles so completely that he does not even go over the South American scripts," wrote Time.

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The show was canceled after the sponsor decided it was not attracting a big enough audience.

But the ever-in-motion Welles already had moved on and approached the War Assistance League of Southern California with another of his ideas – “The Mercury Wonder Show for Service Men.”

It was a circus-like exhibition, heavy on magic acts, under a big tent situated on property donated by MGM and not far from another wartime respite, the Hollywood Canteen. The development of the show came at about the same time as Welles’ military status was settled in May 1943 – officially 4-F, unfit for the armed services because of medical reasons.

For at least part of the time, entertaining the 1,000 servicemen for each show, the magician packing them in was Welles himself, who is said to have invested \$40,000 for the tent, scenery, costumes and props.

He had star-studded help, to be sure. Magazine article and book authors cite the enlistment of Joseph Cotten as cast member and co-producer, wife-to-be Rita Hayworth as magician assistant (for at least one performance), followed by helper Marlene Dietrich. There were 17 weeks of rehearsals, during which Welles tried out 18 different show openings before he was satisfied.

Only the general public paid for a ticket, and the money went to the League’s program for military assistance. After months of rehearsals with movie stars and the Mercury troupe ready, the show opened on Aug. 3, 1943, for a five-week run and an ultimate military audience of 48,000.



Orson Welles with Rita Hayworth and his radio and movies colleague Joseph Cotten in 1943.



Advertising for “The Mercury Wonder Show.”

OTR: What’s not to like?

By BOB COCKRUM

In short, to put it kindly, what’s your least-favorite old-time radio show? Less kindly, what OTR productions were real stinkers, according to some members of the MWOTRC?

Ask an open question and you get open answers, some that are difficult to categorize. Herding these cats into a neat package is impossible, so we’ll just start and see where it leads us. (And we must apologize for any lost responses during the long time we waited for them to trickle in. Count yourself an unsung hero anyway. For the heck of it, I will sometimes chime in with my own thoughts.)

Here’s a surprise. Frank Morgan singles out *Escape*. To lessen the shock, he hastens to add that he’s referring to certain episodes.

“I guess I just don’t want to ‘get away from it all’ to some of the locales they want to send me,” and he cites those involving foreign dialects. “As I am usually listening casually or while doing other things, my brain doesn’t capture everything with the dialects” and those “heavy in dialect frequently have plots that don’t appeal to me – shrunken heads or curses.”

Wesley Lehman has praise for the “Three Skeleton Key” *Escape* episode of 1949, with

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William Conrad in the tough, in-charge role, but he says the repeat broadcasts of 1950 and 1953, with Vincent Price as Louis, delivered “a poor imitation of the original performance ... (in which) the acting was perfectly done. ... The remakes are some of the worst things I have ever heard.” Declaring that brilliance, in this case, only struck once, Wesley also had no use for the same story done on *Suspense* in 1956 and 1958.



Vincent Price

It wasn't rats in a lighthouse that made John Abbott's skin crawl – it was listening to *Lum and Abner* – “I don't know why; maybe the rural humor is too much of a stretch at being hokey.”

Edgar Russell, responding on behalf of his late father, reports Edgar F. Russell Jr. “hated *Lum and Abner* with a passion” that extended from childhood to being a retired Navy officer listening to WAMU's *The Big Broadcast* repeats of radio classics. Edgar III said his father would, fortunately, fall asleep during the *L&A* reruns, necessitating a phone call to say, “Hey, Dad, wake up! *Gunsmoke* is on in five minutes!”



Chester Lauck and Norris Goff
“Lum and Abner”

[At the mention of *Gunsmoke*, I'll address two of my least favorites of the genre. What radio show with Jeff Chandler could possibly be bad? *Frontier Town*. With organ music befitting *Archie Andrews* and with a sidekick done as W.C. Fields, it couldn't have been worse, considering some storylines were of a more mature nature. Unless you time-travel to 1958 and *Luke Slaughter of Tombstone*. To think that William N. Robson was director! By now, CBS knew well how to do a Western, exemplified by *Gunsmoke*, *Fort Laramie* and *Frontier Gentleman*. But here we have lines spoken mostly in a monotone with varying degrees of gruffness, plus another clichéd sidekick in “old-timer” voice.]

Mike Hamm declared that any soap opera would qualify as his least favorite kind of show, but he singled out *Young Widder Brown* for little to nothing happening and the heroine repeatedly almost re-wed when something would result in the marriage being called off. “I finally figured out that if she actually married, then they couldn't call it *Widder Brown* anymore.” Bride or not and forever a “widder,” Florence Freeman was cover story material in 1947 for an issue of *Radio Mirror*.



In the comedy department, Mike chose *My Friend Irma* as a loss – “It's just not funny” – compared with the great ones like *Jack Benny* and *Fibber McGee*,” adding, “I also like *Vic and Sade*, but I know many people don't. I wonder how many ‘I hate *Vic and Sade*’ responses you will get.”

Getting responses from MWOTRC members is like getting witnesses of a Mafia murder to testify. However, “My least favorite is *Vic and Sade*,” wrote Rebecca Jones. “Mercifully, it was a short program, but all they do is talk, nothing really happens and the people and events they talk about aren't very interesting.” Rebecca said there wasn't any reason to root for any of the characters “because none of them had even a whiff of drama in their lives.”

[I list *Vic and Sade* as one of my favorites, taken in small doses, along with *Easy Aces*, because of the relaxed, easy patter, silliness, and clever puns and malaprops – despite Jane Ace's (much like Portland Hoffa's) irritating voice.]



And since we're on the subject of comedy:

“I never could stand Bob Hope,” wrote Joanie Leonard. “I liked everybody on the show except him. I thought he was arrogant ... there were many inside jokes that the general public could not understand.”

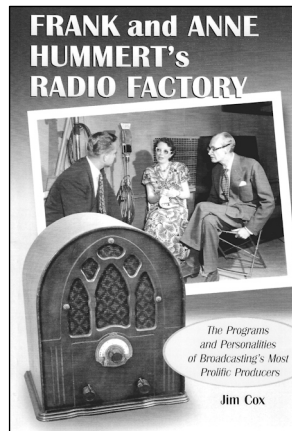
[I get it ... the little barbs that he tossed out concerning the military outpost he was playing, the commanding officer there and so on. I mostly liked him, but my big disappointment among those I grew up watching on TV was in listening to recordings of

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The Red Skelton Show from the late 1940s. The man giggled, ad-libbed and seemed to step on everybody's lines (and songs) to the point of my annoyance, if not theirs.]

While Bob Bowers favors detectives (public and private), he said, "*Danger, Dr. Danfield* with Steve Dunne is my personal candidate for the worst radio show. In second place comes any Hummert mystery show where character names are repeated incessantly." [So take that, Mistery Keen and Chameleon, Inspectors Thorne, Hearthstone and Sabre, et al.!]

Sandra Pitts-Malone calls out *The Witch's Tale* and *The Hermit's Cave* as among the worst of that type of show because plots were simple, characterizations were two-dimensional and the sounds effects were also simple and unimpressive.



[I'll add *The Weird Circle* to Sandy's list because of its tiresome introduction and intermissions of a ringing bell, sloshing water and, it seems to me, for the mid-1940s, rather stilted acting.]

In an email of March 31, Jack French noted two of his favorite Saturday morning shows – *The House of Mystery* and *Archie Andrews* – but they were separated by one he deemed a clunker, *The Billie Burke Show*, in which she discussed with her dim-witted brother-character, Julius, "household items that were neither funny nor interesting to kiddy listeners."

[And finally, in a message asking for submissions, I mentioned there were a couple of shows that I thought started badly and grew out of it. Those would be – *Father Knows Best*, in which Jim Anderson first showed all the intelligence of Chester A. Riley, and *Dragnet*, which portrayed most of the cops, especially the superiors, with chips on their shoulders, barking orders and otherwise talking in Joe Friday's stiff manner.]

A Letter from the Editor

Tales of Rabbit Tracks, Trails and Down the Holes (Adventures in Old-Time Radio Research)



The article spotlighting the puffery surrounding David Sarnoff and the Titanic disaster (Radio Recall, April 2023) underscores the importance of separating fact from fiction and the difficulty in doing so. It is to my everlasting chagrin that I passed along the Sarnoff lies to students enrolled in "Intro to Telecommunications" classes back in the 1970s. If only I had known of Carl Dreher's book wherein the truth finally began to be spoken.

Now, to clarify, illuminate and otherwise pull ourselves out of some rabbit holes, we submit the following:

To complete the story of Johnny Roventini (Radio Recall, February 2023), we had hoped to provide a picture of Johnny's "Call for Philip Morris" bellhop uniform, donated after his death in 1998 and on display at the American Advertising Museum in Portland, Ore. Well, not quite. Over time, we found the privately operated museum had closed in 2004, and its exhibits went to the Eisner Museum of Advertising and Design in Milwaukee. That

museum, founded in 2000 and closed about 10 years later, morphed into the Eisner Creative Foundation. The daughter of the advertising executive for whom the museum was named told us that its exhibits have been in storage since then.

In the meantime, with that "tiny posse of little impostors" dressed as the genuine person, it's obvious there could be many such uniforms making the circuit of collectibles auctions, if not other museums.

On Dec. 11, 2018, *the* or *a* Johnny uniform (sans pants) did not sell at Heritage Auctions. In 2019 in New Jersey, Leland's – known more for its sports memorabilia transactions – sold a Johnny uniform (with pants) for \$1,452. On June 14, 2020, a complete uniform with Brooks Uniform Co. labels attached (Johnny Roventini's name, Waist 28½, Length 24½), sold at Clars Auction Gallery in Oakland, Calif., for \$2,000 – much below its expected top bid of \$6,000. Less than two months later, Clars sold another Johnny uniform set for only

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\$600. Such is fame, the passage of time, the economy, etc.

In the August 2022 issue of Radio Recall with its first of the series about Robert Trout, the mention of the program *Farewell to Studio Nine* (page 8) tells of the July 1964 move of CBS News operations from 485 Madison Avenue in connection with the new CBS corporate headquarters building, known later as “Black Rock.” To be clear, the moves were related, but the radio and television shows (news and other productions) of the network were moving to 524 West 57th Street, dubbed the CBS Broadcast Center. The opening of Black Rock on Sixth Avenue was not until March 1965.

The challenge of “getting it right” has always loomed over journalists dealing with events as they happen. Often, they are off a bit. Take the March 15, 1933, Broadcasting magazine photo cutline describing the microphone stand given to President Roosevelt by CBS (Radio Recall, February 2023, page 10). Herbert Glover is identified as the director of news broadcasts for CBS. Not so. His official title was director of special events.



John G. “Jap” Gude in his CBS office in the early 1930s.

John G. Gude, an assistant at various times to Glover and the news director, Paul White, wrote that Glover “was generally known to the engineers, with whom he worked very closely, as ‘Madman Glover.’”

Trout, in the Newhouse Oral History Project, remembered President Roosevelt’s first inauguration:

“The man who came down to run (CBS coverage) was the head of special events in New York, a man named Herb Glover, a semi-wild man. He’d show up once in a while in Washington in a pilot’s outfit – white coveralls and goggles. He wasn’t a pilot, but he had himself flown down. He’d have lunch in Washington for some kind of meeting and then he’d go back. This was absolutely unheard of. ... Crazy Herb Glover, to come down just for lunch.”

In that same interview, Trout said that White, after he was appointed news director, tried several times to reclaim the job of handling special events and publicity, too, but was not successful, and after Glover was fired (Trout’s word), Gude moved into

the job before leaving to be a talent agent – for Trout, Edward R. Murrow and others.

While White had leeway in the day-to-day news operations at CBS and was somewhat free to experiment and innovate, the real power, Trout said, was in the hands of the company’s executive vice president who, in effect, ran the network for William S. Paley. Edward Klauber was a former newspaper reporter and city editor at the New York Times. After leaving the Times, he first worked in advertising and public relations – not the best of fields for his personality – before coming to CBS.

Trout recalled the special broadcasts – the German invasion of Poland in 1939, for instance – and how the ordinary pressure he felt was magnified when Klauber was close by.

“He had a reputation of being a very tough man in business. But having the news background, when something happened – like the war’s beginning – he kind of felt like he was still in (journalism) ... and he came down that day and actually took a seat right next to me in the studio,” said Trout. “That didn’t please me too much. But he made all the decisions that day, and no one would say ‘no’ to Mr. Klauber if he said ‘yes’ or otherwise.”

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