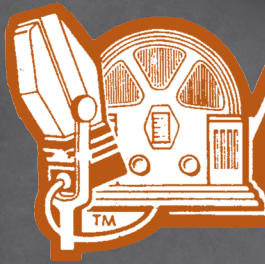


RADIO BLOOPERS OF 1949 • YOUR UNSEEN ADVISER • THE OTHER AMECHE • JACKIE GLEASON ON THE RADIO



sperdvac

RADIOGRAM

Volume 47 • Number 2

MAY 2023

Behind The Doors of
**MYSTERY
HOUSE**



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from the president

GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS!

NOW that winter is firmly behind us and spring is in the air, the season of new opportunities is upon us. I have been impressed with the growing interest of new audio productions from our members. The conversations have been along two different paths. As we all know, there are numerous classic radio programs that exist only in written form. The original recordings are unavailable, and any existing copy is in such poor condition it is usually unlistenable. I respect the fact the many collectors set a very high bar for the any new production of a cherished series from an original script.

The second path is new productions from modern scripts. Yet, as we know, new doesn't necessarily mean better. Or in some cases, even good. I recently listened to an episode from a modern-day audio producer. It was okay. Nothing really to write home about. What was missing was a sense of 'how' the production would be heard/received by an audience. I'm sure the producer understood what was going in the show, but as an audience member, half the time, I did not. Overlapping effects, lack of clear transitions, ambiguous dialogue, had a cumulative negative effect on the production. Yet, with all that, believe it or not the production showed promise.

There is a growth in maturity that happens in a producer's skills when comparing their 'current' work to productions made during the Golden Age of Radio. I have yet to hear just *one* new production, even with all the modern digital editing and sound effects, come within driving distance of *I Love a Mystery*: "Temple of the Vampires" when our three heroes are suspended by ropes trying to reach safety.

Many of you know that in addition to directing live re-creations, I am also an audio producer. Some years ago, I had the privilege of doing a re-creation of the very first episode of *I Love a Mystery*—under the guidance and approval of the Carlton E. Morse estate. This was a special experience because the original episode had aired for only one night. When the series had its Hollywood run,

it began with episode two. It turns out that episode one, when originally written, had some favorable comments regarding China. However, by the time of the series reboot, the U.S. relations with China had changed quite a bit, and an executive decision was made to skip episode one and start with the second one.

Our performance of the first episode production was done live on stage with Bob Hastings, Tommy Cook, and David Dubov as Jack, Doc, and Reggie. Weeks of preparation were invested in preproduction and crafting the sound design. I was working with any director's "Dream Team" so the production was well received. It was an honor to be involved.

Each of us has a role in the continuation of our cherished audio arts. Please take the time to offer your informed feedback and sage wisdom to our new producers. The producers and directors of the radio series we loved in the past all received cards and letters providing feedback after their shows aired. That feedback helped them perfect their craft. That is why we have the audio treasures we have today. Please consider emailing your feedback, post a message, send a letter, anything sharing your insights and observations. This is the gift we can impart with our new talent.

SPERDVAC currently has some volunteer positions available for those who are interested. First and foremost is the position of secretary. It's an import role within the organization, and we could certainly use the help of any member that would like to contribute their time and talents. We are also looking to you, our members for an official SPERDVAC historian. If you have an aptitude for documenting and archiving, your skills would be put to very good use.

Until next time, stay safe and stay tuned!📻

Timothy Knofler



Oh! What Fluff Our Dreams Are Made On!

RADIO BLOOPERS OF 1949

“PRESENTING A PROGRAM FOR YOUR EVERY NUDE.”

If those words issued from the loudspeaker of your radio, as you contentedly sat back puffing your pipe, would you immediately start hunting for your favorite burlesque artiste, or would you just let it ride as a fluff? Because that's actually what it was.

Announcer Roy Neal's tongue slipped on a “program for your mood” while broadcasting from a Philadelphia station, to bring that city one of its better fluffs of the year.

Under a fluff, you realize by now, is a tongue slip made by a radio announcer, and quite a few choice variations managed to work their way over the airwaves from time to time. For instance, Tom Moore was fully aware that the store he claimed was “easily available by truss, Bolly and el” really could be reached by bus, trolley and el.

See what you can do with brass ashtrays. An announcer did the same thing. Another drew quite a bit of unfavorable comment for his mineral water sponsor, when he failed to stress the last two letters of the slogan, “Drink yourself to health.”

Tongue slips can be quite embarrassing, but an omitted word can cause even more trouble. A finance company cancelled its program because an announcer dropped the word the “not” from the sentence “They are not loan sharks.”

The omission of the word “with” made an introduction cause for humble apologies when listeners to a baseball preview were surprised to hear, “—and now here he is the dope from the training camps Douglas Arthur.” That same Douglas Arthur had no cause to squawk, because he recalled the day he informed his listeners that they just heard “a 15-minute program featuring a half-hour of the records of Tommy Dorsey.”

The baseball broadcaster who had Joe DiMaggio “backing—backing to the fence—his head hit it—it drops to the ground—he picks it up and throws it to third” left listeners speculating as to whether the great DiMag owned a removable

top piece.

Probably the commonest of all fluffs occurs when an announcer moves from one station to another and from force of habit continues to advise listeners, they're being entertained by the station he used to work for instead of the one now paying his salary.

An occasion worth celebrating was that which occurred when an announcer new to Philadelphia told his microphone that it belonged to a station in Rochester. The cause for cheers was a new engineer. He threw the wrong switch, and the announcement never left the studio, proving that two wrongs can make a right.

But tongue slips aren't the only troubles of radio spellbinders. Memory lapses do their share towards driving program directors crazy. Doctor J. Arthur Myers, a Doctor of Philosophy, who broadcasts as “Your Unseen Advisor,” needed some advice himself the morning he turned his program back to an announcer with whom he had worked for 26-weeks thusly: “and now here is our good friend . . . hmmmm . . . I've forgotten his name with a message from our sponsor.”

Then there was the announcer who forgot the lyrics to Ozzie Nelson's recording of “The Little Guppy” with which he was concluding a program. He had the engineer fade the music under his voice as he told the listeners, “we'll be back with another in this series of programs tomorrow at the same time” and then had the music brought back loudly just in time to have a female voice yodel, “It stinks!”

Rupe Werling, production manager at WIBG Philadelphia, from whose collection this article was compiled, has his own pet fluff, which dates back to the days he was an announcer and called skunk-dyed opossum, “sky-dunked opossum,” not once but twice in the same day. The third time he was scheduled to read that same furrier's commercial, he rehearsed and rehearsed. Again it came out as “sky-dunked opossum.” Thereafter, as far as Werling was concerned, that fur was one that was never sold.🐾



Rupe Werling, station manager at Philadelphia's WIBG, from whose scrapbook these bloopers were collected.



OLD NEWS IS GOOD NEWS. Anonymous writer for *Radio and Television Mirror* (July 1949) offers a collection of misfires from Philadelphia radio stations in 1949.

YOUR UNSEEN ADVISER

Whatever Your Need He'll Fulfill It



John Arthur Meyers, Ph.D

by Rei Dorne

THE USE OF “UNSEEN ADVISER” as the signature of advice mongers was varied in the golden age of radio with few receiving any kind of notice. One Unseen Adviser, however, was Dr. Albert Long, or Archie Flasher, whose advice to the lovelorn reached levels of notoriety in 1938 when he was arrested for, of all things, bigamy.

But a more endearing Unseen Adviser was one John Arthur Meyers, Ph.D., whose program began in 1938 commensurate with his newspaper column of the same name. Meyers' program at the beginning was no different from others of the same character; he offered advice to the bereft and counsel to neurotic listeners. But by the late 1940s Meyers' program ventured beyond domestic relations to the needs of desperate individuals, and it is with the latter that Meyers as the Unseen Adviser received more approbation than others of his ilk.

Dr. Meyers was described as a man gifted with a sense of humor and, most importantly, a profound optimism. He spent 21-years in broadcasting before settling at WIP in Philadelphia where he was known as a sort of miracle man. One listener described Dr. Meyers as “someone who would set the world straight when it goes awry.”

Dr. Meyers was 53 when he joined WIP in 1940 at which in total he had received over 200,000 problems to solve. He was able to handle only a small portion of the requests during his Sunday 12:30-1:00 p.m. WIP slot, but he claimed to have answered all requests. “No problem,” he once said, “is ever left without help.”

To accomplish this he said he spent at least six hours per week dictating answers for return mail. It was even reported that when he was rushed to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy he requested that microphones be set up in his room and following the operation his program continued from bedside without interruption.

Most of the requests dealt with domestic and family problems of the emotional and psychological type. But what set this Unseen Adviser apart from others was his dedicated quest to answer all questions or needs no matter how unusual and extreme. For instance, over the years Dr. Meyers had received a number of letters containing “conscience money.” In one specific instance a letter contained five 10-dollar bills sent from a conscience-stricken ex-G.I. who had stolen the money from a buddy while overseas. He wanted to return the money anonymously but didn't know how to locate his friend. The Unseen Adviser found the friend and the money was returned. All in a plain, unassuming and understated manner.

Other requests were just as odd. During World War II he received

a letter from a chaplain asking for sheet music. One mention of it brought more than a half-ton of sheet music within 24-hours. A little girl lying in the operating room of a hospital refused to undergo a delicate eye operation unless the Unseen Adviser was with her. He was. A mother in Wisconsin, whose daughter was to be married in Philadelphia, was afraid no one would attend her wedding. The Unseen Adviser invited his listeners to attend, filling the church on the daughter's special day. Both sides of a bakers' strike in Philadelphia called upon the Unseen Adviser to take sides, but he wisely straddled the fence and wisely explained the benefits of compromise, and to the surprise to all involved his wisdom apparently settled the differences.

So adept at meeting the needs of his listeners that one listener quipped, “Gee, I wish I had a problem so I could write to you.”

Listeners were always offering him things to give away; refrigerators pianos radios—he'd found homes for at least 1000 puppies. Once, he even gave away a complete shoe repair shop that was worth thousands of dollars. It was offered by a woman whose husband had suffered a heart attack. She preferred to have the Unseen Adviser give it away to a deserving listener—and he did.

His secret, he admitted rather humbly, was that he had no complicated plan, no fancy policy, or astute theory but just his humanity. He said he treated his listeners as he himself would want to be treated. He said he didn't believe in preaching to those who had made mistakes, but rather he tried to help them to make good and to learn from their errors. The identity of persons sending in problems was never disclosed, and when asked by reporters what he attributed to the loyalty of his listeners he replied that he never lied or misled them. Honesty was always foremost when relating to his listeners.

Interestingly, in later years into the mid-1950s, Meyers reverted to astrology. Although he maintained a sizable audience he answered fewer and fewer requests, preferring to analyze lives by reading horoscopes.

But despite his realignment to the stars, as it were, his legacy was that of a truly unseen, unassuming adviser to those in need. Perhaps his most difficult if interesting task during this period was exemplified by a simple letter he received one sultry July afternoon:

Dear Unseen Adviser:

Although this is July, do you know where I could get a Christmas tree?

Thank you, and Merry Christmas.

Dr. Meyers did.

He got it—completely trimmed.♣



THE OTHER AMECHE

Jim Ameche

Jim Ameche was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, one of eight children. During his early years he wanted to be a civil engineer, and had no interest in drama until high school, when he became a member of the debating team and drama society. He also did some local non-professional radio.

During the summer of 1933 Jim decided to go into broadcasting, and auditioned in Chicago with several hundred entrants for the lead in a new radio series. Jim won the part, and became the original "Jack Armstrong," the nation's most famous "All American Boy." While in Chicago he went on to "Attorney at Law," one of the earliest soap operas. He also played leading roles in such series as "Grand Hotel" and "Win Your Lady." Then he was off to Hollywood and such classics as "Woodbury Hollywood Playhouse," "Texaco Star Theater," and "Lux Radio Theater."

In the early 1940's Jim moved to New York to do "Big Sister," a very popular soap opera. At the same time he emceed the "Saturday Vaudeville" series, which introduced to network radio such talent as Jan Murray, Morey Amsterdam and Jackie Gleason. Then came "Here's to Romance," which helped discover Dick Haymes, and re-discover Buddy Clarke.

It is impossible to list all the programs Jim participated in during the forties and fifties, but here are a representational few: GRAND CENTRAL STATION (lead, emcee), BROADWAY MATINEE (series with Alfred Drake and Celeste Holm - emcee, foil, straight man), WHAT'S NEW (emcee), KRAFT MUSIC HALL (with Eddie Duchin, Edward Everett Horton, etc. - emcee, straight man), HOLLYWOOD OPEN HOUSE (one of the highest budget shows in radio - emcee, lead), GRAND MARQUEE, WELCOME TRAVELERS, MR. FIRST NIGHTER, SILVER EAGLE (alternated with "Lone Ranger"), and AMOS AND ANDY (announced for its last six years in radio).

Times changed, and the disc jockey show replaced the large-scale radio production. Jim adapted easily to the new trend, with music shows first in Chicago, then in Los Angeles, and now in New York City. His syndicated music shows have been among the largest in existence, covering many areas of the United States, as well as almost every free country in the world. To date he has done over 50,000 radio programs, and it has been said that his voice has been heard internationally more than that of anyone in broadcasting. Presently he has a daily audience in excess of 300,000,000 listeners. All this, combined with his extraordinary sponsor sales record, have made the name of Jim Ameche one of the most renowned in broadcasting.

WITH
KILLS

THRILLS
CHILLS

Behind The Doors of

MYSTERY HOUSE

by
Gary Coville

Mystery House has been a mystery itself. It is something of an enigma to radio researchers and fans because of its vague history and the generic nature of its title, and as such the series has been frequently skipped over when it came to historical scrutiny. What we can say is that this *Mystery House* premiered in Chicago in 1944 and employed some of the top talent Chicago had to offer at the time.

ARIVETING MYSTERY STORY has often provided welcome escape from a humdrum and fretful world. Insert the word *mystery* in the title of any book, film, stage production, television or radio play and audiences become suddenly engaged. Radio was invariably cognizant of the venerable format's appeal and a mystery series was usually economical to produce.

For radio, the problem became finding new and innovative ways to frame and present the traditional mystery. In February 1944, Chicago radio station WGN figured it had found something different by offering a new anthology series called *Mystery House*. Each disparate mystery play was held together with one unifying thread of explanation. The title of the series refers not to the traditional haunted house but rather to a publishing house. As explained at the beginning of each episode, *Mystery House* was a publishing firm exclusively limited to mystery novels. Owned and operated by a husband-and-wife team, Dan and Barbara Glenn, the company had a unique way of evaluating works submitted for consideration. Each week, the staff of *Mystery House* would act out a novel in order to judge its merits for publication.

Mystery House itself has posed something of an enigma to radio researchers and fans over the years. Due to its vague history, and the generic nature of its title, this series has frequently been skipped over when it came to historical scrutiny. John Dunning, for instance, excludes an entry for *Mystery House* entirely. Partly, the problem must be attributed to the show's somewhat generic title. "Mystery House" and variants have often been used. The title was used for a 1938 film starring Ann Sheridan and Dick Purcell. *House of Mystery* was a radio series running on the Mutual Network between 1945 and 1949. *Mystery House* was used as the title of a proposed syndicated series with Bela Lugosi. An audition recording for this proposed series has long been in circulation; J. David Goldin dates the audition to July 3, 1944.



The title of the series refers not to the traditional haunted house but rather to a publishing house.

To compound matters further, is a full-page ad appearing in the June 28, 1944, issue of *Variety* by the Frederick W. Ziv Company. The announcement alerted clients to Ziv's move to new quarters on Madison Avenue and listed programs in current production as well as touting four upcoming programs then in preparation. One of these new series was to be called *Mystery House*. Whether Ziv's *Mystery House* references the Lugosi audition or yet another use of the title remains an open question. However, the closeness of dates suggests this as a distinct possibility.

What we can say is that the *Mystery House* series this article is concerned with premiered over Chicago station WGN on Saturday, February 19, 1944, at 9:30 p.m. Produced by W. Biggie Levin Productions, *Mystery House* would use some of the top talent Chicago had to offer at the time.

For the first 15 months of the series, Rye Billsbury played the part of Dan Glenn. Billsbury was then a popular actor and announcer working on a freelance basis in Chicago radio. The fact that Rye's father was a veteran theatrical agent in Chicago clearly helped suggest acting as a career to Billsbury who was born John Michael Riorden Billsbury on March 2, 1918. Rye was a nickname for Riorden and when he went into radio he chose to use Rye as his given name. Billsbury would eventually change his

name to Michael Rye when he moved to the west coast and began working in film and television. As he would explain to Chuck Schaden in a 1979 interview, he had grown weary of forever having to correct people when they mistakenly called him Pillsbury.

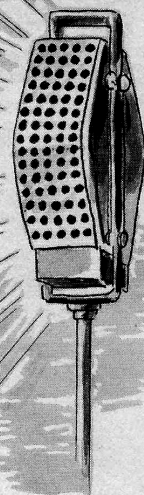
By the time he was signed for *Mystery House* Rye had already logged time in the title role of *Jack Armstrong*, appeared on the streets of Chicago as a roving news reporter and turned up in several soap operas including *Ma Perkins*, *Backstage Wife* and *The Guiding Light*.

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MYSTERY
HOUSE

WITH
KILLS
THRILLS
AND
CHILLS



MYSTERY HOUSE, fictional of course, publishes mystery novels. Before each novel is accepted for publication, the story is enacted by the Mystery House staff. This format permits the use of a wide range of characters, locales and situations.

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Mystery House goes into national syndication in 1946 through Harry S. Goodman Radio Productions



For the first 15 months of the series, Rye Billsbury played the part of Dan Glenn. Billsbury was then a popular actor and announcer working on a freelance basis in Chicago radio.

ANNETTE SARGENT was assigned the role of Barbara Glenn. Sargent was another in-demand radio performer working freelance in Chicago. At the time, she was also appearing with Billsbury in *Ma Perkins*. Sargent logged



Creative force behind the success of *Mystery House* included producer Ed Kahn; Fred Levings, producer of WGN's companion crime feature *County Sheriff*; and George B. Anderson scriptwriter for both series. Seated is Hilly Saunders, radio director with Mitchell Faust Advertising in Chicago, representing Peter Hand Brewing Company's Meisterbrau.

recurring roles in *Lonely Women* and *Road of Life*. Her myriad guest appearances included parts on *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Chicago Theater of the Air*. Sargent would remain with *Mystery House* throughout its run.

Edmund Kahn, an assistant production manager at WGN, was handed the job of director for the new series. Kahn had been an accountant in New York in 1937 when he decided to move into radio. Kahn worked in the production office of *We, the People*. He later became production supervisor for *Gang Busters*, *Mr. District Attorney* and *Sky Blazers*. In 1942, Kahn moved to Chicago and joined WGN.

George B. Anderson penned the scripts and would prove a major reason for the popularity of *Mystery House*. Before he turned to radio scriptwriting, Anderson had been editor of *The Tribune* newspaper advertising service in Chicago. While attending a party one evening, a salesman for a Chicago radio station mentioned that he had a sponsor interested in a mystery series. Did Anderson know of a possible writer? Anderson was intrigued and decided to try his hand at crafting a radio mystery. By early the next morning, he had a script ready for a series he called *Easy Money*. Soon afterward, Anderson was writing radio scripts full-time.

George Anderson had a rather distinctive approach to writing mystery scripts, as he explained to Marguerite Ratty, in an article for the *Chicago Tribune* (October 27, 1946). "I don't think much about plot outlines or solutions," he said, "I just type away." Anderson explained that he wouldn't settle on a culprit until the last three pages. "I figure if I haven't got the goods on someone by then, the listeners won't either."

Anderson's approach to writing was evidently sound. He was prolific in

output, sometimes turning out as many as four scripts per week for various assignments. Away from his typewriter, however, crime and mystery had no place in Anderson's life. He eschewed listening to radio mysteries, reading mystery novels or viewing mystery films. He was habitually afraid of unconsciously misappropriating the plot of another writer. The ban even extended to Anderson's children who were not even permitted to listen to one of their father's own radio plays.

The Peter Hand Brewing Company, a local firm, and a major advertiser in the Chicago market, signed on as sponsor to promote its Meister Brau label. Tom Cafferty came onboard as announcer. Cafferty had served as a staff announcer at WGN until inducted into the Army and subsequently serving in the Medical Corps. He eventually received a medical discharge from the Army and returned to WGN just in time to pick up the *Mystery House* assignment and proselytize on behalf of Peter Hand and Meister Brau.

Casts were routinely held to no more than eight actors. Supporting players noted as making appearances on *Mystery House* included Herb Butterfield, Barnett Franks, Art Hern and Robert Dyrenforth.



Herb Butterfield

With all the necessary components in place, *Mystery House* was ready to make its debut on February 19, 1944, with "This Man Was Poisoned." Although WGN was a major player in the Mutual Network, *Mystery House* did not go out across the full network. Nonetheless, WGN's 50,000 watts of broadcasting strength was enough to reach a significant swath of mid-west listeners. WGN audiences responded positively to the new program from the start.

The first Hooperating recorded for *Mystery House* registered 3.9 and the numbers would steadily increase from there. By the following year, WGN was publicly boasting in full page ads in *Broadcasting Magazine* that *Mystery House* had just attained a 10.5 Hooper and was leading "all studio-originated

local shows in the Chicago Market.” The series was slated weekly, 52 weeks a year; there were no summer breaks.

Mystery House originated each week from Studio One, WGN’s main studio, and always before a live audience. With a seating capacity of 545, all seats were usually taken; reportedly the studio was sometimes filled to overflowing. Tickets were free and available from the public service offices of the Chicago Tribune, which owned WGN.

Mystery House aired its 100th episode, “End of Sentence,” on January 20, 1946; by that time, a couple of noteworthy changes had transpired. Billsbury had been replaced by Forrest Lewis in the role of Dan Glenn, effective with the May 27, 1945, broadcast. Billsbury then shifted into the announcer’s role for a time.

The popularity and staying power of the series eventually came to the notice of Harry S. Goodman, president of a radio production company bearing his name and a major syndicator of transcribed series. *Mystery House* seemed a good bet to Goodman for syndication. Good-



Patrons line up for admission to WGN's studio one for a broadcast of *Mystery House*

100th Show



Forrest Lewis and Nannette Sargent, as Dan and Barbara Glenn of W-G-N's *Mystery House*, are ready to broadcast the 100th thriller in the series at 9:30 to-night.

Chicago Tribune celebrates the 100th broadcast of *Mystery House* on January 20, 1946, over WGN.

man approached Biggie Levin, owner of *Mystery House*, and a deal was struck for Goodman to purchase the syndication rights to the series. A brief reference to the deal was mentioned in *Broadcasting* (May 28, 1945). *Mystery House* would continue, as before, as a locally produced and aired series within WGN's transmitting reach. Goodman Productions would record 52 episodes of the series and make those transcriptions available to clients outside the Chicago area.

Once *Mystery House* entered syndication and Goodman Productions began promoting the series, it was looked upon as almost a new series in some radio quarters.

Variety now felt *Mystery House* deserved review. In its February 6, 1946, edition, the publication considered the transcription of “Death at Deadline.” The episode, *Variety* observed, held the listener’s interest well with “intelligent scripting, directing and thespianing.” The reviewer singled out Nannette Sargent, commenting on her “compelling dramatic job” and

noting that the other cast members were “right on the ball.”

By this time, Goodman Productions had placed *Mystery House* in a number of major markets including Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, St. Louis, Buffalo and Honolulu.

The final live broadcast of *Mystery House* came on November 27, 1946. By that date, approximately 135 episodes had aired from WGN’s Studio One. But that wouldn’t actually ring down the final curtain on the series. As Jeanette Berard and Klaudia Englund have documented, WGN spun off a successor series just a week later using virtually the same cast, crew and format as *Mystery House*. This new series was called *Mystery Playhouse* and would run from October 5, 1946, to September 5, 1948. When *Mystery House* ended, *Mystery Playhouse* moved into a Saturday night timeslot and continued with business as usual. George Anderson continued to pen the scripts; Forrest Lewis and Nannette Sargent continued as principal players. Ed Kahn was still

directing, and Tom Cafferty once again served as announcer. The premise now was that the program title referred to a theatre that produced only mystery plays. Theater members would act out newly submitted scripts for possible production.

If Mystery House has managed to cause confusion among radio fans and researchers trying to sort out the background of the series, it's *Mystery Playhouse* successor can only add to the confusion. It might easily become confused with the 1944-1947 AFRS series of the same title hosted by Peter Lorre. However, other than 11 *Mystery Playhouse* scripts housed in the Special Collections Department at the Thousand Oaks (CA) Public Library, nothing else seems to have survived of the series.

The *Mystery House* episodes that have survived, 31 by most accounts, all appear taken from Goodman's syndicated transcription discs with nothing earlier from the live era. Eighteen of the Goodman transcriptions eventually fell into the hands of Radio Archives which subsequently restored the sound quality and



Rye Billsbury had been replaced by Forrest Lewis in the role of Dan Glenn, effective with the May 27, 1945, broadcast. Nannette Sargent continued her role as Barbara Glenn, and both would remain with the series until its final broadcast. Sargent was another in-demand radio performer working freelance in Chicago. At the time of her casting as Barbara, she was also appearing with Billsbury in *Ma Perkins*.

released them on compact discs.

Comparing Goodman's numbered transcription labels, proffered by Radio Archives, against newspaper records and researched radio logs, it is possible to pinpoint the Goodman timeline. The Goodman transcriptions would have started on August 19, 1945, with the episode titled "A New Lease on Death," and concluding with the August 9, 1946, broadcast, "Murder is an Art."

Goodman's syndicated version of *Mystery House* would continue to play in markets across the country well into the 1950s. As late as 1954, Goodman's Company was explaining to *Sponsor* (July 1, 1954) that its catalog of mystery shows, specifically including *Mystery House*, was proving highly profitable in helping "program hungry stations fill gaps and attract sponsors."

But by the time

Harry Goodman had died in 1962, *Mystery House* had become one of radio's fading memories.🎧



TUNE IN MARCH 1945 CAPTION. Chicago IL — Station WGN — Leading lady Nannette Sargent looks over a gruesome collection of weapons used to "bump off" undesirable characters in the *Mystery House* series. Author Anderson likes to give listeners their money's worth has managed 62 killings in 29 broadcasts.



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The Great One Ingratiates the Radio Audience

JACKIE GLEASON came to radio in 1944 but didn't stay. Not because he wasn't good enough for the medium, but rather the venerable "theatre of the imagination" simply couldn't project the facial and physical characteristics that were part and parcel of Gleason's comedy.

Jackie's first sustained radio presence, aside from an occasional one-off appearance, was as emcee for a comedy variety program called *Look Ahead*, carried over New York station WOR. Gleason commenced his duties at WOR on January 21, 1944. In his column the next day, Ben Gross declared Gleason the best emcee *Look Ahead* ever had. Although *Look Ahead* was strictly local, Gleason's talents as a comic were suddenly on exhibit to a wider audience than his usual nightclub crowd.

Jackie had settled in comfortably behind the WOR microphone by the time he opened on April 8 at the Century Theatre in *Follow the Girls*. The hit musical comedy suddenly vaulted Jackie into the limelight as the newest and most talked-about comedian on Broadway.

The Radio Hall of Fame quickly picked up on Gleason's newfound stature and tapped him for a guest appearance on the hour-long program. Gleason made his debut on nationwide radio on May 21, 1944, representing the musical comedy stage. Other celebrities that night accompanying Jackie included Bob Hope, Jane Froman, Cornelia Otis Skinner and The Art Tatum Trio. Jackie's turn at the microphone consisted of a preposterous biographical sketch attempting to explain to listeners where he came from and where he was going.

By October, Gleason was appearing weekly for Old Gold cigarettes on *The Jackie Gleason - Les Tremayne Show* carried over the NBC network. How Jackie got to that point is an interesting story of musical chairs. Old Gold had been sponsoring *The Bob Crosby Show* emanating from Hollywood. When Crosby left in June 1944 to serve with the Marines, the decision was made to shift a reconstituted version of the program to New York. Searching for a replacement for Crosby, Old Gold's representatives settled on comedian Bobby Clark. Clark debuted as a Vaudeville comedian before Gleason was even born. However, Clark backed out of the deal at the last minute. Jackie quickly found himself auditioning for the vacant spot using Bobby Clark's original script and was summarily hired.

Les Tremayne had been Crosby's announcer and was given equal billing with Gleason apparently as a means of rewarding him for his

prior service and keeping him onboard with the new setup in New York. Mannie Manheim wrote the scripts; Maury Holland produced the program and Sylvan Levin served as musical conductor. Andy Russell and Patsy Garrett were regularly featured vocalists. On the August

13 premiere, Jackie began by reprising his autobiographical sketch from his *Radio Hall of Fame* appearance. Edgar Bergen made a guest appearance to help usher in the new show.

Reviews ranged from mildly positive to enthusiastic with Jackie receiving the most positive attention. *Variety* (August 16, 1944) said that Gleason showed potential but found the premiere less than inspiring. The fault was assessed against the writers and a lack of originality, not Jackie. *Radio Daily* (August 17, 1944) seemed to find no fault with Gleason or the scripts.

Jackie pretty much owned the microphone according to this review. However, the full ensemble earned praise and demonstrated "that a package, when unstintingly wrapped, has big things in store."

Perhaps the most prescient comments of all were offered by the critic Jack Gaver (August 15, 1944). Gleason, Gaver observed, "did better than alright. But however funny he may sound on subsequent programs,

those who won't see his broadcasts will be missing half the fun. Offhand I can't think of another top comic who is as much fun to watch work before a mike." Television, according to Gaver, was invented especially for Gleason and it was only a matter of timing before the two of them connected.

Perhaps part of the fun of watching Jackie work at the mike was the fact that he apparently didn't allow himself to become encumbered with a script. According to reports, Gleason would commit his lines to memory and go to the microphone with his hands free for action.

The Jackie Gleason - Les Tremayne Show bowed out on October 22, 1944. It seems Old Gold had switched advertising agencies and with the change came the demise of Gleason's show. By then, however, Jackie had other offers on the table. *The Kate Smith Show* offered a 13-week contract for Jackie's comedic skills. Kraft Cheese was reportedly interested in developing a new series especially for Gleason. However, neither of these nor any of the later rumored projects materialized. Jack Gaver was spot on with his assessment. Jackie Gleason and television were created for each other. When the two hooked up audiences appreciated that Jackie needed to be seen as well as heard. 📻



ORIGINAL CAPTION. J. Walter Thompson Co., 420 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y., Jackie Gleason-Les Tremayne Show • Exclusive in Your City • August 7, 1944. JACKIE GLEASON, sensational comedian in Broadway's popular musical "Follow the Girls," dons top-hat and shoulders his valuables before taking off from the premiere of his new Sunday night Old Gold show with Les Tremayne, August 13, at 10:30 P.M. (EWT) over NBC. The Jackie Gleason-Les Tremayne show will feature the new singing stars Andy Russell and Patsy Garrett.



KEN MURRAY SAYS:

According to high administration officials, Congress is moving full speed ahead in order to finish its tasks and go home by the first of June . . . What gets me is why Congress should be so anxious to take a vacation when we're the ones who are really over-taxed.

When both Congress and the schools are out in June, that's about as far as the comparison goes . . . at least the school kids improve every year.

Of course, when the children get home they have to show the folks that they've passed their exams . . . the average politician gets by with the homefolks by merely passing the buck.

So remember:

You can lead a politician to office but you can't make him think.

April 1936

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Jack French, OTR historian, author, dies in Fairfax, VA

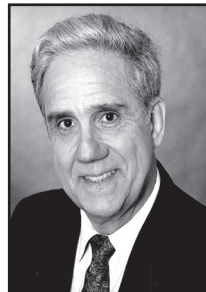
Jack French, old-time radio historian who published countless articles and authored or edited books on radio history, died of Lymphoma April 18, 2023, at age 87 at his home in Fairfax, VA.

Known as a keen historian with an eye for detail, Jack is best known for *Private Eyelashes: Radio's Lady Detectives* (2004), which won him the Agatha Christie Award for best non-fiction, and as co-editor with David S. Siegel of *Radio Rides the Range: A Reference Guide to Western Drama on the Air 1929 - 1967* (2014).

Jack's professional career was as adventurous as the radio drama that he wrote about. He was a Navy Officer from 1959 to 1962 in charge of tracking Soviet submarines. In 1963 he joined the FBI as a special agent and whose first assignment was investigating the Kennedy assassination. He later served as Chief of the Research Unit in the Public Affairs Division. He was also the bureau liaison with the Department of Justice in the Crime Resistance Program and made personal appearances with

McGruff, the crime fighting dog.

Jack retired from the FBI in 1986 and worked in corporate security.



Jack was also an accomplished actor, appearing in over 40 community dramas and in 1992 earning membership in SAG and AFTRA. At that time he appeared as an actor or extra in over a dozen major films as well as in television's *Homicide*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *Veep*, and *House of Cards*. In recent

years he was a guest lecturer at museums, social clubs, and senior facilities speaking on a host of topics including the Lindbergh kidnapping, Civil War heroines, and early women aviators.

Jack was a member of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, Metro Washington Old-time Radio Club, the Kings Park West Civic Association, and St. Mary's Catholic Church of Fairfax Station. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Cathy; six children, nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren.



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