

# RADIO RECALL

June 2017, Volume 34, No. 3



## HOWDY DOODY ON RADIO

From 1947 to 1960, *The Howdy Doody Show* entertained children across the country, credited by historians as one of the leading reasons why television became a staple in American living rooms. Each week young children watched the antics of Clarabelle the Clown, Mr. Bluster and an attractive Indian Princess named Summerfall-Winterspring. Howdy Doody had red hair, 48 freckles (one for each State of the Union) and was voiced by Bob Smith himself.

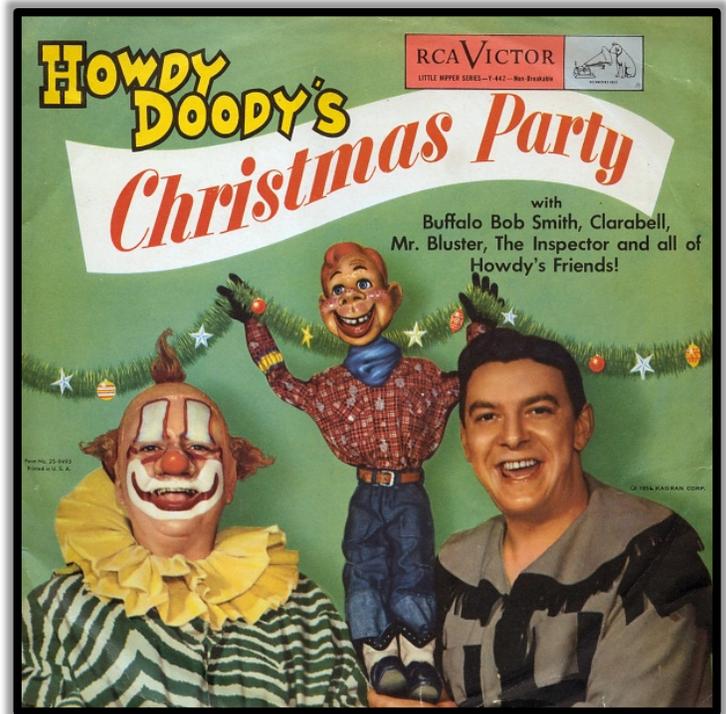
*The Howdy Doody Show* was a television program of historic firsts. It was Howdy Doody's face that appeared on the NBC color test pattern beginning in 1954, was the first children's program telecast in color on NBC, and was the first children's program to be broadcast five days a week. On the afternoon of February 12, 1952, *The Howdy Doody Show* reached celebrating its 1,000<sup>th</sup> telecast. To mark the occasion, celebrity guests Milton Berle, Ed Wynn, Jack Carson, Danny Thomas, Dave Garroway, Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney, and Kukla, Fran and Ollie were celebrity guests.

Bob Smith got his start in broadcasting on WBEN radio in Buffalo, NY, after being discovered by singer Kate Smith. He later moved to WNBC in New York City. The character of "Howdy Doody" began on Bob Smith's radio program, *Triple B Ranch*, in 1947. At that time, Bob Smith was voicing a character named Elmer who always greeted the children in the audience with "Howdy Doody, Kids!" Soon the children were calling Elmer by the name of "Howdy Doody." Later in 1947, Howdy Doody made his television debut and grew to popularity. In 1950, Smith gave up his radio show to devote full time to *The Howdy Doody Show* on television.



The Saturday (later moving to Sunday) morning radio program was produced and directed by Simon Rady, a package production of the Kagren Corporation. The entire radio program originated from New York City. Every episode was taped in advance during the week, children that appeared on the television program as members of the Peanut Gallery were also treated to a weekly radio broadcast. The script writers were Bob Cone and Eddie Keane; the latter was also the musical director. It was Keane who wrote most of the the music Howdy Doody sang on the program. Celebrity guests paid visits from time to time (usually to cross-promote other NBC programs). Bob Smith himself played the piano in novelty numbers. In short, the radio program was pretty much the same as the television series, with added sound effects and without the visuals.

In the minds of the juvenile listeners, the “All-Clown Band” probably consisted of a dozen face-painted clowns – the kind you would see in a traveling circus. There was only one person in the band, however, Buffalo Bob Smith who whistled, played the washboard, bells, spoons, horns, and frying pans. Clarabell, initially played by Bob Keeshan (who would later gain fame as Captain Kangaroo) never spoke on the television series. For radio, he honked a horn instead of talking. Some might believe a sound man was responsible but Keeshan was indeed present in the studio, in complete clown makeup. (Remember, children were present in the studio.) Keeshan also supplied the voice of The Inspector, the rarely-seen-on-TV Zabby (also known as the “man from Mars”) and Flubadub, “the only talking animal in radio.” Bill Le Cornec was the voice of Dilly Dally. Dayton Allen supplied the voice for Mr. Bluster, Phineas P. Bluster, Flubadub and on rare occasions he doubled for the voice of Howdy Doody. Allen’s last radio broadcast was November 29, 1952. Bob Keeshan’s last radio broadcast was also November 29, 1952. Keeshan went on strike for more money. Effective with the broadcast of December 6, 1952, Bob Nicholson played the role of Clarabelle as well as all the other roles Keeshan played. (Nicholson later went on to more success as co-producer of television’s *The Newlywed Game*.)



Today, very few of the general public know that *The Howdy Doody Show* was broadcast on radio. There has been speculation among some historians that the radio program was nothing more than audio tracks from the television series, but recent archeological diggings verify this was not the case. The radio series consisted of original material created and produced specifically for the audio medium.

At present a total number of 17 radio broadcasts exist in recorded form. Only 10 have been assigned broadcast dates and many of these dates assigned by collectors are apparently inaccurate (citing Wednesday and Thursday dates, not Saturday or Sunday).

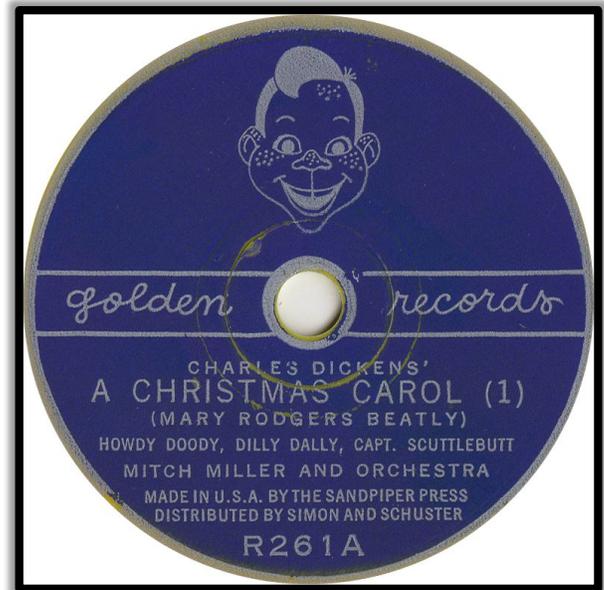
Among the highlights of the radio program was the premiere broadcast of December 15, 1951. Milton Berle, the popular television personality, and his little daughter, Vicki, were guests. Western star Gabby Hayes, who appeared in a number of *Howdy Doody* television broadcasts, made his first of many appearances on the premiere radio broadcast, telling tales of stagecoach times and about his uncle who drove a reindeer stage one Christmas. (Gabby Hayes would make his second visit to the radio program on February 16, 1952.)

For the broadcast of December 22, 1951, Bob Smith told the story of "The Little Branch," a Christmas story about the little branch on a big pine tree that became a Christmas tree. The broadcast of January 12, 1952, featured a dramatization of "Hopalong Riding Hood," spoofing the Western cowboy hero and the fairytale. The February 23, 1952 broadcast of *Howdy Doody* was a special George Washington program, with the stories and songs about the first President of the United States.

Beginning with the broadcast of August 23, 1952, an announcement was made during the International Shoe-sponsored segment about a Poll Parrot Shoe write-in gimmick. Every youngster who wrote in to tell what he liked about Poll Parrot Shoes would get a membership card in the "Howdy Doody Thinker-Upper Club," which had just been organized. The two best letters received each week would be read over the air and the writers would receive a special gift such as a Howdy Doody doll or a Clarabelle doll, or a Howdy Doody Phonograph. Kids simply needed to visit the nearest Poll Parrot dealer; take a look at all the Poll Parrot shows and then go home and write their letter.

The Presidential election of 1952 received major television coverage, much more than the 1948 election since most Americans did not have a television set. As a result, Howdy Doody ran for public office. Free campaign buttons were distributed to any child who wrote to the network. Young children all over the nation had been encouraged to send in their votes. This was not just a publicity stunt for the television and radio program, but an attempt to convince the executives at International Shoe to continue sponsorship of the radio program since they expressed a desire to option a clause in their contract to cease sponsorship. They reportedly received over 60,000 requests, statistically representing one-third of the American homes with television sets. Within the first two weeks, other potential advertisers were convinced and the Howdy Doody radio program was successfully profitable for NBC-Radio. Among the new sponsors was the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company. During the radio broadcast of November 8, 1952, an announcement was made that "Howdy Doody" had been elected "President of all the kids in the United States," due to the overwhelming response.

With Buffalo Bob Smith's love of radio, after the conclusion of the *Howdy Doody* television show Smith purchased a radio station in Maine and continued his career in broadcasting as an announcer and emcee for numerous radio programs.



## Broadcast Breakdown

### December 15, 1951 to September 5, 1953

East Coast Broadcast: Saturday from 8:30 to 9:30 am

West Coast Broadcast: Saturday from 12 noon to 1:00 pm

### September 6, 1953 to April 18, 1954

East Coast Broadcast: Sunday from 9:30 to 10:30 am

West Coast Broadcast: Sunday from 12 noon to 1:00 pm

(times also varied in different areas)

In the Los Angeles area, *Howdy Doody* aired only twice on the radio and at a different time slot from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. on September 6 and 13, 1952, hoping to attract a local sponsor. Also, for the June 21, 1952 broadcast, only the second half was heard on the repeat West Coast show (12:30 to 1:00 p.m.).

## Sponsors

-- December 15, 1951 to March 15, 1952, sustained

-- March 22 to June 14, 1952, the 9:00 to 9:15 a.m. portion was sponsored by International Shoe. (West Coast Repeat was 12:30 to 12:45 p.m., obviously) One exception: Over WNBC in NYC, International Shoe was not the sponsor.

-- June 21 to August 9, 1952, sustained. (International Shoe took a summer hiatus)

-- August 16, 1952 to March 14, 1953, the 9:00 to 9:15 am segment sponsored by International Shoe on a portion of the network only. (Other stations sustaining or co-op).

## IMPORTANT! MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE



A reminder that club dues are due by July 1.

\$20 for locals, \$15 for seniors and people who do not live locally. Your membership dues provides you with six newsletters every year. You can send your membership dues to:

John Reiser

P.O. Box 329

Mt. Vernon, VA 22121

If you have any questions, call John at 703-780-4824 or e-mail him at [treasurer@mwotrc.com](mailto:treasurer@mwotrc.com)

## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As the new editor of *Radio Recall* I would like to thank Jack French and the entire cast and crew of the Metro Washington Old-Time Radio Club for allowing me the opportunity to take over the reins of this bi-monthly newsletter. Jack deserves recognition and a well-deserved pat on the back for his long-term devotion. I am excited for the many articles scheduled for the coming months. Among them is a statistics report for the radio quiz program, *You Bet Your Life*, recent discoveries about *The Lone Ranger*, and an article that is sure not to disappoint: an in-depth overview of *Renfrew of the Mounted*, compiled from recent archival diggings. I am also open to any submissions you want to send my way. (This also includes letters to the editor.)

My e-mail address is provided below.

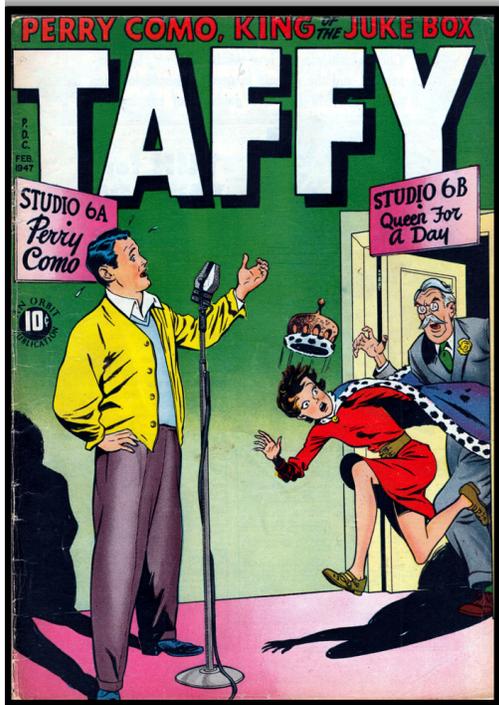
Martin Grams, Jr.

[martingramsjr@icloud.com](mailto:martingramsjr@icloud.com)



## OLD-TIME RADIO IN THE COMICS

By Steven Thompson



Taffy # 6 (February, 1947)

From most of the same folks who brought you *Patches*, *Taffy* is the female equivalent, complete with wonderfully expressive art (by the great Mort Leav) and celebrity cameos. As usual in this genre, teenage Taffy and her blonde bucktoothed sidekick Putty cause all sorts of unintentional



calamity. In this particular issue (#6, February 1947) they run rampant through a radio station, starting out as members of a tour but ending up with our heroine as a winning contestant on a *Queen for a Day*-style program, known here as *The 24 Hour Princess Program*. After this humorous story is a four-page "open letter" about tolerance, acceptance, and diversity, ostensibly from singer and radio star Perry Como to his then six-year-old son.

Another radio star and recording artist, Kate Smith, receives two illustrated pages regarding her fan club and charitable acts. Both features are by Maurice del Bourgo, whose cartoon faces of celebrities were always spot-on.

## RECENT DISC-OVERIES

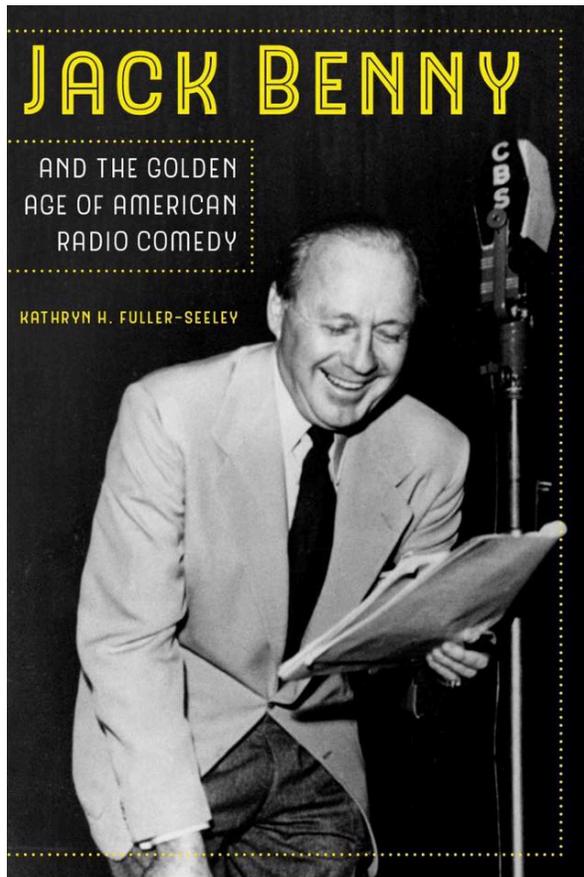
The National Film and Sound Archive in Australia unearthed something of interest for most of our readers. Comedian **Jack Benny** was interviewed by Binny Lum (pictured on the right) while appearing in Melbourne at the Comedy Theatre in 1964.

Courtesy of Sharon Terry and Geoff Charter, this rare radio interview runs 11 minutes in length and is available through Sound Cloud at the link provided.

And be sure to check out the NFSA's other recordings available!

<https://soundcloud.com/nfsaaustralia/jack-benny-interviewed-by?in=nfsaaustralia%2Fsets%2Fbinny-lum-interviews>





Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley has been researching the radio career of Jack Benny and spent many years digging through archives. Unearthing hundreds of fun facts about Benny's radio career that has never been published, Kathryn's findings are about to be published late this year with *Jack Benny and the Golden Age of American Radio Comedy*. The publication date is October 24, 2017 and is available on Amazon.com for pre-sale. The photo pictured on the left is a cover of her book.

The American Radio Theater Group has been re-enacting numerous radio dramas of the past, along with creating some new dramas, for quite a while now. Their total accomplishments is fast approaching 100. Their latest effort is note-worthy as it reproduces from an original 1940s radio script an episode of *Retribution*, a short-lived 1953 program starring Lou Merrill, which is considered "lost." No recordings are known to exist. Actors Ivan Cury and Beverly Washburn are among the cast. You can listen to the recording here:

<http://amerad.libsyn.com/retribution-operation-perjury>

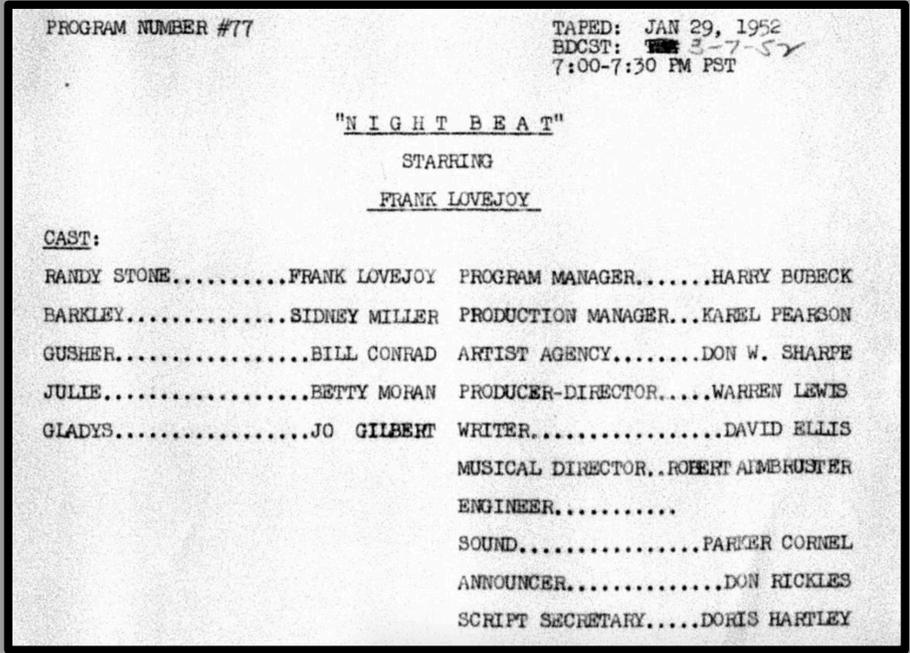
Briana Isaac of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, cold posted a query on an old-time radio Facebook page that her father was radio director Antony Ellis. "I have all his old scripts from radio shows including *Gunsmoke*, *Frontier Gentleman*, *Black Saddle*, etc. I'd appreciate suggestions on what to do with the scripts." Numerous collectors responded, each with various suggestions from scanning everything and posting it online to donating the volumes to a local University for a tax deduction.

From collector Joe Webb: "Bob and Ray fans! Edited versions in nice sound of their 1976 WOR shows are now at the link below. These were recorded by me when I was in college for a northwest U.S. fan who then edited them down to skits and other chatter. These were thought 'lost' until I reconnected with that fellow collector about two years ago. They have been posted through the efforts of BNRTtoast there -- who has also posted many other recordings throughout B&R's career. He claims that these 16 are some of the best sounding recordings of this era of B&R history. Enjoy!!"

[https://archive.org/search.php?query=bob %26 ray WOR 1976 Greybelt](https://archive.org/search.php?query=bob%26rayWOR1976Greybelt)

## A "LOST" NIGHT BEAT RADIO EPISODE DISCOVERED

Jeff Wiles, a resident of Fresno, California, and collector of old-time radio, was browsing the internet when he discovered an episode of *Night Beat* that he had not heard before. Jeff thought he had every existing episode of the series. This one was titled "Gusher James" and it turns out to be among the earliest surviving shows in circulation. Jay Hickerson's *Ultimate Guide* did not list this episode as existing. As Jeff reported, "This potential missing episode from *Night Beat* popped up on YouTube. It's an AFRS version from 1952. I'll let you experts determine if it is in fact a missing episode, and correctly date it."



*Night Beat* is among the numerous radio programs that have received very little documentation beyond encyclopedia entries and because none of the episodes featured official script titles, recordings of *Night Beat* commonly circulate with "descriptive collector titles," often assigned by vendors of old-time radio programs. "Descriptive titles" have, on many occasions, created confusion among collectors who would fall victim to purchasing duplicate recordings, each with a different "descriptive title." A more secure method of cataloging recordings that do not contain official script titles is through episode numbers or broadcast dates.

Consulting *Night Beat* radio scripts it was quickly determined that the recording should be dated March 7, 1952 and, yes, this was indeed a lost episode of *Night Beat* not yet listed among collectors... officially. While it has been available for decades, Jay Hickerson never listed March 7, 1952 as existing. This resulted in many collectors of OTR overlooking this recording. Jay has since been provided the broadcast date to add to the official count (formerly 76, now 77). A scan of the script cover is included for your review.

## TWO COOL BITS OF TRIVIA ABOUT "NIGHT BEAT"

Take note of two interesting bullet points in the illustration above. The title of the program, *Night Beat*, is two words, not one. Other than advertising in magazines and newspapers, the script covers are the best way to determine the proper spelling of radio programs. *Gang Busters* is two words. *Broadway Is My Beat* is featured on the script cover but some newspapers and magazines referred to the program as "Broadway's My Beat." (Historians prefer to go by the script cover.) Also note an announcer by the name of Don Rickles. This was announcer Don Rickles, not the comedian with the same name. Two entirely different people.

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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 second Friday evening of every month, except June and December, when meetings are held Saturday noon at a local restaurant TBA.

## **UP-COMING EVENTS**

### **July 8 to 15, 2017 Cruising with Greg Bell**

Sponsored by Dream Vacations of Fulton, Maryland, this Caribbean cruise is hosted by Greg Bell, host of *When Radio Was*. There will be vintage radio re-creations, quizzes, and live sound effects with all passengers participating under expert guidance. Fun and educational to boot. Cruise starts in San Juan and goes to Bonaire, Curacao, Aruba and St. Maarten. For more details call 800-269-2127 or go to <http://www.cruisingwithgregbell.com/>

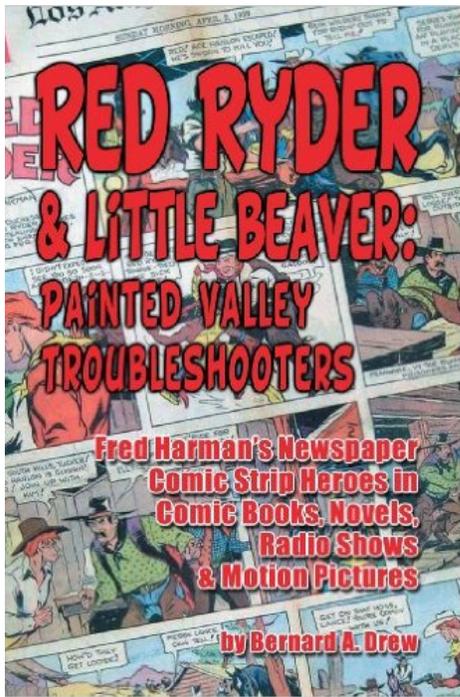
### **July 27 to 30, 2017 PULPFEST 2017**

Now at a new location this year. The Double Tree by Hilton in Cranberry, Pennsylvania. (North of Pittsburgh). The massive dealers' room at *PulpFest* is brimming with a wide variety of vintage paperbacks, digests, men's adventure and true crime magazines, first edition hardcovers, series books, dime novels, original art, Big Little Books, B-movies and serials and related collectibles, old-time-radio shows, and Golden and Silver Age comic books. From *Nick Carter* to *The Shadow*, it is all here. Please note that *PulpFest* is not a comic book convention. For more information: [www.pulpfest.com](http://www.pulpfest.com)

### **September 14 to 16, 2017 Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention**

Hunt Valley Wyndham Hotel, Hunt Valley, MD. Among the celebrity guests this year are: Aileen Quinn (from *Annie*), Dawn Wells (from *Gilligan's Island*), Maud Adams (Bond girl from *Octopussy*), Lee Aaker (from *Adventures of Rin-Tin-Tin*), and Barbara Carrera (Bond girl from *Never Say Never Again*). More to be announced. Attend seminars on old-time radio, pulp magazines, vintage television, classic movies, and more. Large vendor area. Over 3,500 people attended last year. For more information: 443-286-6821 or visit <http://midatlanticnostalgiaconvention.com/>

## RED RYDER AND LITTLE BEAVER GET CENSORED



Fans of *The Adventures of Red Ryder* take note: “America’s famous fighting cowboy,” the red-haired, red-shirted hero first seen in a series of short stories by writer-cartoonist Fred Harman, received academic treatment a year ago and already the book is selling for five times more than the cover price. The 200-page book is titled, *Red Ryder & Little Beaver: Painted Valley Troubleshooters*. Written by Bernard Drew, the book documents Fred Harman’s comic strip heroes extensively. This is the same Bernard Drew who wrote two fantastic books about Hopalong Cassidy.

As a result of a recent legal issue, the book is now out of print. A short time after the book became available, the owners of the trademarked property contacted the publishing company, Bear Manor Media, issuing a formal “cease and desist” letter.

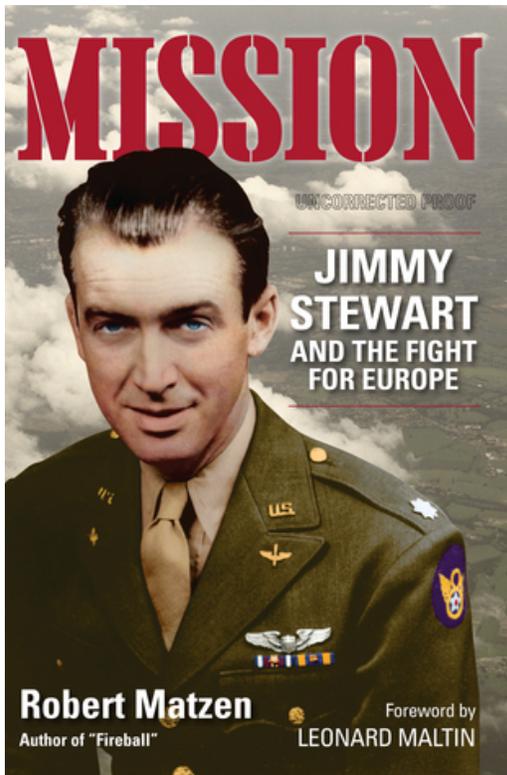
Legally anyone can write a book when the facts are presented academic. And that is exactly what Bernard Drew did. But there is a difference between copyrights and trademarks and King Features Syndicate, Inc., for reasons unknown, decided the book was not in their best interests and felt the publication was a violation of their trademark rights. Naturally, the publishing company offered a royalty for book sales, but a representative of King Features refused. *The Adventures of Red Ryder* pre-dates a baby boomer generation and combatting an aging fan base and a declined economy, it was decided by Bear Manor that future book sales would not have justified the hefty legal expenses to fight it out in court.

The book documents every aspect of the *Red Ryder* franchise. From a biography of Fred Harman, the origin of the comic strip, original stories in Red Ryder comic books, documentation about the radio program (more extensive than any write-up found in encyclopedias), how the character changed during World War II, public appearances in rodeo tours and parades, the reason why the television pilots failed to sell, Republic Pictures and the motion-pictures they produced, Little Beaver Town in Albuquerque, the Fred Harman Art Museum... it’s all here under one cover.

Could *Red Ryder* join the ever-growing statistic of literary pop culture heroes who faded in obscurity? Who today can name the actor who played the title role of radio’s *The Adventures of Jimmie Allen*? Who remembers the musical theme of *Silver Eagle*?

Extremely few copies were printed and sold before the book was pulled from distribution. If you can find a copy for a decent price, buy it today. Five years from now you could resell that same book for a possible investment. As for the author, his efforts were not in vain. Many scholars find amusement when witnessing hefty price tags of their own books, years after they go out of print. For Bernard Drew, this just happened a lot sooner than expected.

## PRESERVING JIMMY STEWART'S WORLD WAR II CAREER



Towards the end of his life, Jimmy Stewart refused to discuss his experiences in World War II. He rarely spoke of his achievements or missions even to his family. And as expected most of the good folks who wrote books about Jimmy Stewart have always focused on his screen career, often dismissing or only briefly mentioning his career in service. Throughout World War II Stewart commanded numerous pilots, led death-defying bombing missions and rose to the rank of Brigadier General. Once in service, Stewart ducked the press at every opportunity and spent four years at air bases serving his country. His enlistment in service was a media frenzy (his fingerprints were taken multiple times for the benefit of the press) and this sparked the actor's decision not to receive preferable treatment because of his California occupation. What Stewart accomplished "over there" he took with him to the grave.

Thankfully, author and historian Robert Matzen went to the trouble of tracking down many of Stewart's copilots, Michael Bandler's donated research at Brigham Young University, and dug through the Military Personnel Records at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri, to read the 600-page military personnel file covering Stewart's career from induction in 1941 to retirement in 1968.

*Mission: Jimmy Stewart and the Fight for Europe* (2017, GoodKnight Books) was long overdue and considering the next few biographies about Jimmy Stewart will only briefly touch on the actor's military career, Matzen has provided us with a chapter in the life of Jimmy Stewart that will fill in a much-needed gap. Matzen's book may even be consulted by other historians writing future biographies about Jimmy Stewart (as if we need another to add to the dozen already published), proving further how badly in need a book of this type was needed.

Authors feel a sense of accomplishment when they win an award but there can be no better reward than receiving a letter from a family relative or historian for what your book accomplished beyond the printed page. Kelly Stewart, daughter of Jimmy Stewart, remarked: "As Jimmy Stewart's children, we have always known that our father's service during the war was the most significant event of his life, although he rarely spoke of it. This book gives us the best glimpse we will ever have of what that experience was like for him and the men he flew with." Regardless of what awards Robert Matzen will receive from this book there can be no greater satisfaction that accompanies this treasured tome than an accolade like that.

You can purchase your copy today at <http://www.goodknightbooks.com/>

## FIRST CLASS

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## RADIO RECALL

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## IN THIS ISSUE!

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editor

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