

Thursday, 21 June 2012

Benny and Azusa

Name Mel Blanc's most famous words in cartoons, and they'd have to be "What's up, doc?" Name his most famous words in radio, and they'd probably be "Train leaving on Track 5 for Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga." Blanc first called the stations on January 7, 1945 and the gag kept right on going into the TV years.

It's a matter of comedy fact that strange sounds are funny. So are words. "Smith" isn't funny. "Krankenschpooler" is funny.



People get very protective about the name of their community, even if it sounds funny. And so it was for some of the burghers of Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga who felt their towns were being ridiculed. That wasn't the case at all. Their towns had odd names, though they were unwilling to accept that, and the names got laughs. As the train-caller routine became a running gag, it got instant laughs.

Here's a piece from *The Independent* of April 20, 1956 where the townsfolk of Azusa weigh in.

Benny's Humor Lost on Azusans

City Is Still Butt of Gag

By RAY DUNCAN

In Azusa a dying job is clinging to a town that is very much alive. The town is still enjoying an ancient gag about itself that it never did think was very funny.

This is the joke. "Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga."

Get it? A lot of people don't when you pin them down after they stop laughing at it.

"Out-of-town people drive into my place," says Azusa service station manager Don Johnson, "and they ask what town this is and when I tell them, they laugh and say, 'Are you kidding? You mean there really is such a place? I thought it was just on the Jack Benny show.'"

"Some yell from their cars, 'Hey, which way is Cucamonga?'" and fall back convulsed by their own wit.

"So this is Azusa," others say. "I was expecting a hick town, a whistle stop, like it is on the radio."

But station agent Amos Hanke said, "I often see them laughing on the bus as they go through, but there's nothing really funny about town. It's very nice. We all take it seriously."

"It still gets a laugh," sighed another Azusan, "but I never could see it myself. Anaheim isn't funny, and neither is Azusa. What makes them seem funny is Cucamonga on the end. But still, Cucamonga wouldn't seem quite as funny if Anaheim and Azusa didn't come first."

"If Jack Benny told you often enough that Pasadena is a funny word," said another Azusan, "it would gradually get to be a funny word."

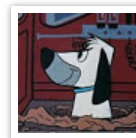
"People used to come out here just to see what Azusa is like in real life," said railroad station agent R. W. Lewis. "That was when the big trains stopped here. They don't stop now."

NEITHER DOES the gag. For more than a decade Azusa has been, facing the fact that it is part of one of the greatest long-running jokes in modern history. Citizens reported yesterday that the gag is slowing down just a little with age.

"But that joke helped put us on the map," says Cornelius Smith, often known as "Mr. Azusa" because he has been a leader here for 50 years. "We got together and we made Jack Benny honorary mayor of Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga (he paused to smile at the famous phrase) and I guess Benny is the only man ever to be made honorary mayor of three cities at once."

In Rhode Island a newspaper columnist once complained that Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga "have

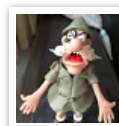
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Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...

4 hours ago

Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



Vehicle Verification Centers of Mexico City will reopen in August with COVID

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollera.com
6 hours ago

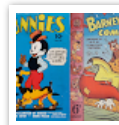
Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle Pe..."
9 hours ago

Termite Terrace headlines



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of

absolutely no legitimate reason for being known anywhere outside Los Angeles County.”

Mr. Azusa wrote a fiery reply pointing out that Anaheim is in Orange County, Cucamonga is in San Bernardino County, and only Azusa is in Los Angeles County—and set the man straight on some other things too.

“Chambers of Commerce from all over the country have phoned us and wired us asking how we managed to get so many mentions on the Benny show,” Smith says.

“Opinions differ on how it all started. A few weeks ago in Pomona a frost warning broadcaster named Floyd D. Young was quoted as saying that the tri-city gag was inspired by his nightly reading of temperatures. Smith of Azusa denies this.

Most of Jack Benny’s gag writers have changed since the 1940’s. even if his gags haven’t, but one veteran is Sam Perrin who yesterday remembered it like this:

“We had decided to do a show in the L.A. railroad station, and we were sitting in the station a couple of days beforehand, kicking the idea around, George Balzer and I, and we heard this train caller sound off, and we decided it would be good to have some funny names called out on the show. We made a list of the funny town names we could think of, and tried them out in combinations, and we finally narrowed it down to you-know-what.”

Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga aren’t even on the same railroad line, but in radio-TV a joke is more important than geography.

A COMMON question from travelers through town is, “Where did they ever get a name like Azusa from anyway?” A common answer is, “Azusa means everything from A to Z in the U.S.A. AZUSA Get It?”

“There actually is almost everything from A to Z here. when you stop to think about it,” said service station manager Johnson. “There’s Aerojet, and the Angling Club, and Azusa Rock and Sand Co., and . . .”

He couldn’t think of anything here that started with Z. Azusa has no zoo and therefore no zebra, but civic honor is saved by public spirited citizens like Henry Zeka, Dorothy Zerell, Norman Ziser, Raymond Zitney, Ivan Zuber and Dalila Zepeda.

The Chamber of Commerce is mystified about the origin of the word Azusa, and only mentions some possible Indian meanings like “watering place” and “place of contented people.”

But if you go to the library you can find three reference books on California place names, all of which say Azusa probably derives from Askuska-Gna, an Indian word meaning “skunk place” or “place of the skunk” or just plain “skunk hill.”

That controversy has never been aired by Benny. On one program, he sent Rochester out to see how things were in Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga.

“I’m in Azusa now,” Rochester phoned back on the air. “All these other towns are blaming each other for being on your program so much. Anaheim is blaming Azusa, Azusa is blaming Anaheim, and Cuca is blaming Monga.”

Any grumblings about Jack’s jokes certainly weren’t official; publicity is publicity, after all. He had been made honorary mayor of the three towns in January 1946 (sparking a forgotten feud with Abbott and Costello).

Azusa hosted Jack Benny Day on behalf of all three on June 15, 1965. Newspaper stories don’t reveal if he arrived by train. It would have been a shame if he didn’t.

Posted by Yowp at 07:58



Labels: Jack Benny

2 comments:



J Lee 21 June 2012 at 17:38

Just as an addendum -- since 1977, the last town on Mel's call has been incorporated as the more highfalutin' Rancho Cucamonga. At least they waited until after Jack died to ruin the joke (Cucamonga, along with Azusa, actually is on the main line passenger trains would have taken between New York and Los Angeles. But you'd need to make a left turn at Union Station, instead of Albuquerque, to get to Anaheim on that route).

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Chris Sobieniak 21 June 2012 at 18:02

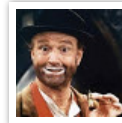
Sad they had to go and do that!



additional covers you could share! ...

17 hours ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Born on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton - *Today's post commences

with the Guzzler's Gin routine ...

1 day ago

News From ME

Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

2 days ago

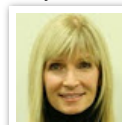
Cartoon Research

In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...

2 days ago

AFRTS Archive

Mary Turner 1985 - Mary Turner today Mary Turner really rocked the house.



Normally when any of the jocks got a reaction, it'd be split.

The ones

that were really liked wou...

4 days ago

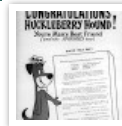
The World of Knight



TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

4 days ago

Yowp



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forms were signed by George Sidney, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera creating what eventually became the biggest TV cartoon operation i...

1 week ago

Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons

Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -

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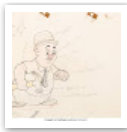
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Original animation drawing from Wabbit Twouble with color notations

for the ink and paint department. Release date: 12/20/41 Availability: Looney Tunes Gol... 3 weeks ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog
The Lady and the Tiger - From the Cathy Hill Archive of Unpublished Comics comes "The Lady and the Tiger". This story was drawn before Cathy started the "Mad Raccoons" series. U... 4 weeks ago

What About Thad?
Cartoon Logic Podcast - And yet another distraction from this brick and mortar blog... I've entered the world of podcasting with renowned animation director and historian Bob Jaques... 10 months ago

Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie
That's all, folks! - My posts have gotten thinner over the years. I'm aware of that. I've been hopeful for a long time, that I can remain active with blogging and sharing furth... 1 year ago

Dr. Grob's Animation Review
The Flying Man - 'The Flying Man' is a very short absurdist film in which a man drops his coat to take a swim in mid air. Another man with a dog drops by, tries the same th... 2 days ago

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