



Wednesday, 2 December 2015

Fred Allen in Maine

Fred Allen griped about many things—mainly involving stupidity, hypocrisy, shallowness and broadcasting—but there were things the old grouse actually liked. He loved writing and he loved his little getaway place in Old Orchard, Maine. He enjoyed rural New Englanders, too. At least, he found them amusing, as that's why he put Titus Moody in Allen's Alley, played adeptly by Parker Fennelly.

Fred seems to have been writing constantly. Toward the end of his life, he wrote two books. He sent letters to all kinds of people; they were corralled after his death and published in another book. He read all kinds of newspapers and wrote letters to the editor. And, of course, he wrote and re-wrote his weekly script, though he had a team of writers who never got any air credit (for a time in the early '30s, NBC banned writer credits), though he'd give a generic blame to one if a gag fell flat.



Allen wrote this feature story for the *Long Island Daily Press*, wherein it appeared on August 29, 1936. The phoney radio feud with Jack Benny hadn't begun, so there's no reference to that. The Hindenburg hadn't come collapsing in flames to the ground, so there's a Hindenberg joke. And a Dionne Quintuplet joke, too. But the story isn't a yuck-fest. It's been years since I read Stephen Leacock but somehow it reminds me of his mild humour.

The photo, no doubt better looking in the actual newspaper, accompanied the tale.

My Vacation By Fred Allen

One of radio's leading comics tears himself away from vacation worries to write this stern but brave little story.

I HAVEN'T seen a microphone in 10 weeks. If somebody walked up to me here on the beach at Old Orchard, Me., and stuck a mike in my face, I'd probably slap it down, thinking it was some black-headed sea serpent. It's been a great summer for Portland and me: Our first real vacation in four years. Last summer we went to Hollywood and I spent most of my time putting on camera paste and falling into a tub of whitewash, while Dick Powell howled. I had to get up at 7 in the morning and often carried on my clowning under the Kleigs until midnight. I got to be such a habitual early riser the milkman's horse called me by my first name. This year, it's been different. We've buried ourselves in a rambling little house a stone's throw from where the waves smacked the beach, and forgot what is jokingly called the world. We bought a little car and Portland turned pilot, making a daily trip to town for groceries and the paper. THERE'S an angle to that car. Portland knew that as a confirmed pedestrian I have hated automobiles since the first honk made a goose of me. Therefore, she took driving lessons secretly, and got her license before we left New York.

I'm glad now she did. The car has been a great help. It's one of those sleek runabouts that make you wonder if the next step in streamlining isn't to pin back the driver's ears. Whenever we got wind that somebody was coming up to see us we'd hop in it and drive up the coast. Nice hospitable folk—I don't think.

To get down to cases, our vacation began the instant we turned over the Town Hall to Stoopnagle and Budd. We went home, threw some things into a couple of grips, grabbed a typewriter, packed three boxes of books to be shipped along, and boarded a northbound train, accompanied by Lastone, Portland's sister and my

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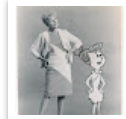


May 1940 - You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

mumbled some uncomplimentary comments at the F.C.C. in May of 1940. The Commission made two rulings, basically tell...

1 day ago

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Wilma - Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name on

television when she was cast to play Wilma Flintstone in 1960. The others were a bit different. Bea Benaderet ap...

3 weeks ago

Blogs to See

News From ME

Mushroom Soup Monday - My "to do" list has enough items on it that I need to put up one of these soup cans that tells you not to expect much (if any) posting here today. A friend...

1 hour ago

occasional typist.

The first night we ran into trouble. The house hadn't been occupied all winter and spring. As we were unpacking I heard a scuffling sort of noise and went out on the porch to investigate. We were being picketed by sand-fiddlers. They'd been using the place as a rendezvous, and we were intruding. I told them to quit crabbing. They winced, and who could blame them?

Next morning I took a walk along the beach, inwardly swearing that the very first oyster who mentioned radio was going to get shut up like a clam. I saw an old man approaching.

"Howdy," he said.

I unsnapped my fountain pen and reached out for his autograph book. He took my hand, mangled several fingers and returned it to me, just in case I wanted it.

"My name's Larkins," he said.

"Mine's Allen," I said. And then added softly, "Fred Allen."

"Glad to meet ye."

I WAITED. The man's calm was admirable. He blinked a watery blue eye at me.

"Ef'n ye need any bait, I sell the best in town," he said, and ambled off.

Somewhat shaken, I continued my walk, wondering if my sponsor had been kidding about that nationwide network. A seagull eyed me and settled on a nearby piece of driftwood. After a winter of bringing talking roosters, dogs, birds and geese to the microphone I instinctively opened conversation.

"Do you know who I am?"

The seagull blinked, studied me, cast an eye at a small fish jumping in the surf, and said nothing. I tried the question again. The gull went, caught the fish and flew away.

I returned to the cottage with one thing clear in mind. We weren't going to be bothered here.

As a matter of fact, these signs turned out to be indicative of our summer. We weren't bothered, except now and then.

THE quiet got us at first. In New York our apartment window admits the regular thunder of the Sixth Avenue L, half a block away. Careful inquiry soon revealed to us that there were no L's in Old Orchard. In fact, the only item an embarrassed Chamber of Commerce could offer in the way of noise is the booming surf—a puny thing compared with elevated trains, screeching taxi brakes and the occasional pop of Thompson guns handled by playful gangsters.

I couldn't sleep the first week. Portland finally settled the problem. Every night at bed time she tuned in those sidewalk broadcasts. Then I'd doze off, happily lulled by bus horns.

There was also the problem of having no work to do. At first I tried helping Portland and Lastone with the dishes. But they soon decided that they could get along without me. You see, I used to be a juggler.

My routine for 39 weeks in the winter had been so rigid—seven days a week—that I was helpless in the face of inactivity. I'd say: "I've got to start into the second chapter of 'Anthony Adverse' tomorrow."

But it was no good. I just laughed at myself—the penalty of being a comedian.

Of course, I did face a real task, if I had wanted to admit it. For more than two years I hadn't had time to sit back and look at what I have been doing, needed time to think about Town Hall Tonight in relation to other comedy shows, time to see whether the structure should be changed, whether there was something brand new waiting around the corner for somebody to hatch.

I had to do a lot of instructive reading, too. I was far behind in my books on humor. Benchley, Tarkington and all the rest—even though they have nothing to do with radio—could prove invaluable to an air comedian by suggesting new lines of approach, new angles of treatment.

AFTER a couple of inactive weeks I began to get under foot. Having grown a little weary of being swept out with the morning sand—only to have broom-wielding Portland say, "So sorry, dear. I didn't see you," I decided really to get busy.

But the books were in big boxes and I looked all afternoon for a hammer to open them. Later, Portland came home from a swim and found the hammer. It was under the chair I'd been sitting in.

The books finally emerged from their dust, took their places in neat rows across the living room bookcase and there was nothing to do but start in. I paced back and forth one morning and studied their jackets, Benchley's "My Ten Years in a Quandary—and How They Grew" beguiled me. I took it down.

Knuckles rapped the front door. I opened the ancient slab with misgivings. It was Mr. Larkins.

"Thought ye might like to go fishing," he said.

I looked at the book. If Benchley had been in a quandary 10 years, he could stay there another day.

"Okay," I said. "Let's go."

I don't remember the fish's name. He was a long, thin fellow with a mean, toothy smile. He accidentally got himself snagged on my hook while tasting of the snack I had lowered to him from the top of the ocean which at



The Exposure Sheet



Craig
Kellman's
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Old Faces,

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2 hours ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



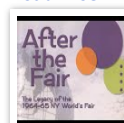
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breaks
Gaza Strip
into two
parts. -
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Cartoon Research

Two Must-Have Cartoon Collections - David Gerstein was pivotal to both these projects - both are close to his heart: Disney Comics and Flip The Frog.
9 hours ago

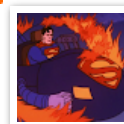
Termite Terrace headlines



Today's
Post: The
1964
World's Fair
Documenta
ry and other

64 World's Fair stuff - This documentary is quite good. Most of you have probably already seen it, but I'm sharing it here anyways. While I'm add it, why not share some ...
22 hours ago

Movies with Michael



The World's
Greatest
Super
Friends:
Lex Luthor
Strikes

Back (1979) - A wonderful episode. In this episode, Lex Luthor escapes from prison by switching places with Lois Lane. After escaping he captures each of the Supe...
23 hours ago

the moment went up and down in a great way.

When I went to remove him from the hook ("No, no, Mr. Larkins, I can do it myself"), he mistook my finger for another snack. He closed down like a quintuplet on a rubber nipple. Before long the digit would have gotten a nod of respect from the man who built the Hindenburg.

I LISTEN occasionally to the radio. Especially Wednesday nights. Early in the summer I had sent Stoopnagle and Budd a joke. Every Wednesday we gather around the radio and tune in on Town Hall Tonight to see if they use my joke. They never do.

Just wait until next summer. I'll take the whole program away with me. Then they'll change their slogan to "Keep Stoopnagle Out of the Poor House."

I tried various excuses after my finger got well. I dared not go fishing again, so I decided to raise a garden.

I bought seeds from the store and went out one dawn and slung them across the sand. Nothing happened.

Each day I'd take a cocktail shaker full of water and sprinkle them. Finally one morning I noticed a small green shoot. Exultant, I called Portland.

"Look," I shouted, "I'm a gardener."

"That," said Portland, stooping and plucking the shoot, "is wire grass and has been here all summer."

I decided there was nothing left then but work. I went in and hunted through the catalog. Then I mailed an order to Chicago. That will give me at least two more weeks of loafing. Because even a little thing like a letter opener—and I couldn't read Benchley without cutting the pages—takes time.

So, until Oct. 7, when we return to the radio wars, Portland and I say: "Tally-ho."

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [12:14](#)



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