



Sunday, 10 December 2017

Comedy and Cucamonga

On January 7, 1945, a call for passengers was heard for the first time: "Train leaving on Track Five for Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga!" It was Mel Blanc's voice on the Jack Benny radio show. Benny milked the gag for a number of years.

It turns out there was soon a battle over Cucamonga. But we'll get to that in just a moment. We'll take a spur line and go off track for just a moment.

While Benny is the comedian connected with Azusa and Cuca-you-know-where, he wasn't the first. Witness this United Press story from June 8, 1940, years before Benny and his cast ever entered a train station.



Pomona Gets For Joke

—By ALEXANDER KAHN

Hollywood—(UP)—One of the "eggs" comedian Bob Hope laid on a recent radio program—and even he admits there have been a few—came home to roost as a full-fledged chicken, with a traffic fine in its beak.

Hope got a speed ticket while breezing through Pomona, Calif., the other day. Busy at Paramount in "The Ghost Breakers," the comedian sent an attorney to make an appearance for him.

"Hope?" mused the judge. "Hope? Oh yes, that's the fellow who is always making cracks about Pomona on the radio. You tell Mr. Hope to come down here and pay his fine in person."

Now Hope is wishing—that someone would tell the good people of Pomona about the use of "locals" by comedians.

In every big city, it seems, there is always one sure-fire laugh for a comedian with a strictly local outlet. Some nearby city or town for some reason seems funny in every around in the profession, they all these towns locals."

Hope is going to appear at Pomona in a big benefit some day soon just to prove he has nothing against the town, and was just using Pomona as a "local." If he keeps on, he may get Pomona into the big leaguers. Like Bismarck, N. D, which comedians agree is funny anywhere in the United States. Or Canarsie, which always gets a chuckle in New York, and Winnetka, the local for Chicago.

Other locals include: Woonsocket, good for a laugh every time in Providence, R. I.; Kennebunkport, which lays them in the aisles way down East; Manayunk, funny to Philadelphians, Hamtramck, a side-splitter in Detroit, and Nahant, which makes staid Bostonians titter.

In fact, Pomona, thanks to Hope, already is displacing Azusa and Cucamonga as Los Angeles laugh provokers.

It would appear the use of "locals" was an old vaudeville gimmick. Robert Lewis Taylor's biography of W.C. Fields quotes The Great Man as telling a Paramount P.R. flak (presumably in the '30s) that Cucamonga was one of them. Fields loved the name. He used it in *The Old Fashioned Game* (1934). Louella Parsons' column of March 25, 1938 reveals:

Bill struggled hard to get the studio to call his next movie, which goes into production April 4, "The First Gentleman of Cucamonga," because he liked that name, but Paramount politely but

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firmly told him no marquee was long enough to hold all those letters. Mary Carlisle and John Howard carry the romantic interest in a story which deals with Bill's adventures as a champagne salesman.

The great book *W.C. Fields by Himself* also contains a treatment for an unmade film about this same time where Fields played W.C. Whipsnade, who inherited a department store in Cucamonga. Incidentally, Fields and Paramount parted company within two months of Parsons' column over a disagreement about the script for the Cucamonga film, which had undergone at least two other name changes.

So it was when the Benny writers came up with the Anaheim-Azusa-Cucamonga running gag, it was really a switch on an old one.

Still, the folks in the three cities didn't care. They seem to have liked the publicity. In February 1946, Benny was elected honorary mayor of all three towns and given a key to the city of each in a formal ceremony (for some reason, Benny wore a sombrero in publicity pictures). This resulted in what I presume were some tongue-in-cheek comments from another comedian who was asked for reaction. It doesn't seem to have gone past this column; there certainly was no radio feud over it and Benny never mentioned any of this over the air. The column appeared February 25, 1946.

Jack Benny vs. Lou Costello

By Virginia MacPherson

HOLLYWOOD, Feb. 24 (UP)—Today we have the fantastic story of how Jack Benny and Lou Costello, two world-famous funny men, are battling over who will be Mayor of the tiny California hamlet of Cucamonga.

The feud started a few months ago as a publicity stunt. Somewhere along the line it got out of hand. Now the citizens of Cucamonga—all 500 of 'em—are caught in the middle. Mighty uncomfortable they are, too.

On one side they have Fiddler Benny insisting he's already honorary Mayor. On the other they've got "Bad Boy" Costello, who says they promised to make him Hizzoner before Benny ever heard of the village.

Benny's press agent got him named honorary Mayor of Cucamonga, Anaheim and Azusa, neighboring towns. He got a lot of publicity in the papers as the "first man ever to be honorary Mayor of three cities at once."

Costello claims the good people of Cucamonga are getting gypped.

"One-third of a Mayor they've got," he declares. "What kind of a deal is that? A fine little orange-growing community like Cucamonga deserves a whole Mayor."

He asks: Has Benny offered to pin a badge on Rochester.

The unhappiest man in town is our father-in-law, John D. MacPherson. He's the guy who encouraged Costello to put in his two-bits' worth.

It started two months ago when we discovered the locale of the new Abbott and Costello movie was Cucamonga, our old home town. We mentioned this to Costello's press agent and gave him our father-in-law's name.

Like a flash he buzzed out to Cucamonga to start his campaign for Mayor. Our father-in-law was a little nonplused.

"We've already got Jack Benny," he said.

Costello's press [agent] again pointed out Benny had three towns to take care of and wouldn't Cucamonga like a Mayor all its own? Our father-in-law said he guessed they would at that. That's when all the trouble started.

Benny said the names of the towns fascinated him when he heard a guy at the Union Depot holler: "Trains leaving for Azusa, Anaheim and Cucamonga!"

So he worked it in on his next broadcast. It was good for a big laugh. The Service Club of Cucamonga sent him a case of California wines.

"That was darn good wine!" said Benny.

The people of Azusa, Anaheim and Cucamonga got so much fun hearing the names of their towns on the air they elected Benny honorary Mayor of all three.

But Costello says his movie will give the town just as much publicity. And he promises to remain loyal to Cucamonga. Even if the citizens of Los Angeles asked him to be honorary you-know-what he'd turn 'em down.



between two boots." Jerry Reed* "Lenny was a comet passing through" Chet Atkins* "If you had dropped...

1 day ago

Termite Terrace headlines



Commercial Corner August--Mel Blanc (In Person) - Mel Blanc

had been in several commercials as an actor. All of which he mentions that he is the voice of the Looney Tunes characters. In the American Expre...

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Movies with Michael



Seeing The Gold Rush (1925) at the Old Town Music Hall - Last night I had

the incredible pleasure of watching Charlie Chaplin's* The Gold Rush* (1925) at the Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo, CA. This is a movi...

3 days ago

Yowp



The House of the Seven Gargoyles - Dick Thomas

pulled a huge workload at the Hanna-Barbera studio. He arrived in 1959 from Walt Disney (after almost two decades at Warner Bros.) to work on t...

4 days ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog Racketty Ann's Mystery Flight!

Here are pages 5 through eight of "Racketty Ann and the Lost World". There's delightful fantasy here as Racketty Ann and Bla Bla take a ride on the back o...

2 weeks ago

Peter Gray's Comics and Art

New blog on my Art work...Original

Cucamonga's success on the radio proved to be a problem elsewhere. Witness this wire story from April 23, 1954:

Cucamonga KO'd As Too Funny

BURBANK, Calif.—Jack Benny and his writers have made Cucamonga too humorous a word for utterance in any serious drama.

Case in point is "Serenade," Warner Bros. feature starring Mario Lanza, Joan Fontaine, Sarita Montiel and Vincent Price.

The vineyard sequence, where Lanza as a California tractor operator learns he is to audition for a professional singing career, was shot at Cucamonga, center of the world's largest vineyards.

Director Anthony Mann ordered the Cucamonga labels obliterated from all the grape crates.

"After what Benny's done with Cucamonga," said Mann, "the mere sight or mention of the name starts a laugh going and in this sequence we don't want laughs."

Some radio and TV critics griped about Cucamonga, saying a regional reference had no business being on a national radio show (Mad Man Muntz and the La Brea Tar Pits annoyed them as well). And not every one in "Cuc—" were happy with being a butt of a joke. Here "—amonga!" is a United Press International story from October 7, 1958.

Cucamonga Name Change Meets Strong Opposition

CUCAMONGA, Calif. (UPI) — Residents of this community asked themselves today, "what's in a name?"

And, the answer of some self-conscious citizens who have cringed at comedians' jibes at their community, was, "plenty."

For years, this area east of Los Angeles has been known by the Indian name of Cucamonga, meaning land of plenty waters, although it's quite dry here.

Now, Cucamongans are considering incorporation and part of the proposal is a resolution to change the community's name to something less funny.

Charles Smith, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, was one of those who is sick, sick, sick of Jack Benny's references to the community.

"Cucamonga has been low man of the totem pole for 'Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga' when someone wants to make a joke about a city," Smith said.

"We're sick of it. Our name is no joke to us."

On the other side was Ted Vath, president of the Chamber of Commerce, who is proud of being a Cucamongan and is not afraid of letting the world know about it. "We think the name is worth fighting for," Vath said. "It gives us identity and we're going to hang on to it."

One of the names on the list of proposed monickers for the community is Arpege, the name of a perfume offered free of charge by the maker of the scent. To Smith, almost anything would be better than Cucamonga.

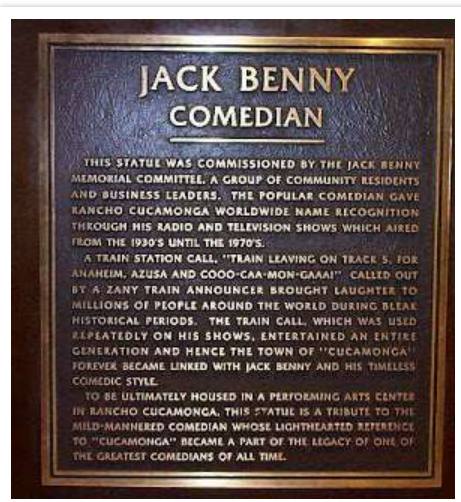
To Vath, the idea of changing the name to Arpege is downright odoriferous.

When the town finally incorporated, it took the name Rancho Cucamonga. And we assume the anti-Benny grump-amongas were a small minority. The area had declared Jack Benny Day on September 8, 1956. There was another Jack Benny Day on December 15, 1965 when Benny arrived in Azusa to receive proclamations of thanks from three towns; though Disneyland and the California Angels baseball team had moved Anaheim into the Big Time. He returned again in 1969, donating his time to emcee a benefit show for the district's disaster assistance programme when the area was hit with floods and scores were left homeless. Jack Benny is honoured in Rancho Cucamonga with a statue. (Thanks to reader Bob Davidson for his picture of the plaque with the statue).

Incidentally, one of Jack's other routines gently jabbed a different small town. We'll have their reaction next Sunday.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:39](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#), [Virginia MacPherson](#)



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



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Soon To
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What About Thad? Chris Reccardi Interviewed

- I don't want to start a practice of publishing an interview every time someone from Ren & Stimpy dies, but Chris Reccardi (1964-2019) was too important a f...

2 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 forth...

6 months ago

Kids, Eh?

#1288: Bird Call - #1288: Bird Call

10 months ago

Cartoons, Model Sheets, & Stuff



Pete
Hothead
Model
Sheets -
Here are a
few model
sheets from

the first Pete Hothead short. Released in 1952 and directed former Tom & Jerry animator Pete Burness. Ted Parmelee was the...

1 year ago

Dr. Grob's Animation Review

Les Contes de la nuit (Tales of the Night) - Les Contes de la nuit' (Tales of the Night) are three fairy tale films French animation master Michel Ocelot made for television, not to be confused with h...

2 days ago

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3 comments:



Eric B 10 December 2017 at 08:31

Never even knew that was a real place, until I got out to LA, and saw it on maps. Then, at one point, someone was selling a keyboard I wanted there, but I had no way to get there without a car. (Don't think Foothill Transit was up yet, or at least did not go near the exact place).

[Reply](#)



J Lee 10 December 2017 at 14:39

The L.A. basin is pretty much one continuous string of cities and suburbs from the Pacific to well past San Bernardino by now, but in the 1940s Cucamonga would have just been another small stop out in the low desert near the Cajon Pass (i.e. -- one of the first places a train would stop after making it through the mountains on the way to Union Station). A town with a funny name out in what was then the middle of nowhere probably struck Jack's writers as funny, and Mel's reading of the line just served to put the bit over the top as one worth coming back to in the future.

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rnigma 10 December 2017 at 18:11

And there was the Homer & Jethro song "The Battle of Kookamonga" (parodying Johnny Horton's "Battle of New Orleans").

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