

Sunday, 20 October 2019

Plain Speaking About Plainfield

Plainfield, New Jersey got almost as much publicity on the Jack Benny radio show as Waukegan, Illinois.

Waukegan was Benny's home town. Plainfield was Mary Livingstone's home town.

Well, that depends on which Mary Livingstone you're talking about.

The character Mary Livingstone was from Plainfield. She was played by Sadye Marks, who then legally changed her name to her character's name. Miss Marks wasn't from Plainfield. She was born in Seattle and grew up in Vancouver in Canada.



Benny liked blurring lines between reality and show biz on his show; when the Benny show was broadcast from Vancouver in 1944, he threw out 12 years of Plainfield and admitted Mary was back in her hometown. It was never mentioned again; it was back to Plainfield for the radio version of Mary.

The confusion encouraged some false memories, as revealed in this story from June 2, 1959 in the *Courier-News* of Bridgewater, New Jersey.

Millions Think So, But ...

Jack Benny's Wife Not from Plainfield

Millions of Americans have heard of the Queen City through a woman who never lived here. She's Mary Livingstone, Jack Benny's "fan from Plainfield, N. J." The whole thing is a 27-year-old radio and television gag that has been popping up periodically ever since Benny, the popular comedian, first used it in 1932.

The story goes this way:

In 1932, his first year in radio Benny had a sketch with a part in it for a fictional fan named Mary Livingstone from Plainfield, N. J. She was supposed to ask the comedian for his autograph.

"It was just a couple of lines," Benny recalled. "But we couldn't find a girl to read it right. I asked Mary (her real name was Sadye Marks, and he had married her in 1927) to help out. She did. Then she wasn't on the next week, and the fans started writing like crazy wanting to know when that girl from Plainfield, N.J. was coming back on the show."

So Mary came back. And from then on she and Jack—born Benjamin Kubelsky—built up by occasional mention the legend that she was a former department store clerk from Plainfield. She was a department clerk. But in Los Angeles, not in Plainfield.

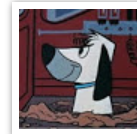
"In fact," Benny once said, the Plainfield gag "is one of the very few things on our program that isn't basically true. Once in a while," he added, "we get a letter from someone in Plainfield claiming they remember Mary's folks and where she lived."

(Although there are several Livingstone—without the "e"—families in the area, only one lives in Plainfield, according to the telephone directory. And Dr. and Mrs. S. R. Livingston of 650 W. Seventh St. have occasionally received phone calls from persons who want to talk with Mary Livingstone.)

Why did Benny choose Plainfield for his bit part?

"We used Plainfield," he said, "because it is close to New York and the name of the seemed just right for this particular character."

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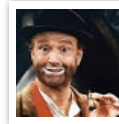


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Cartoon Research

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There's no false memory when it comes to Mary's first appearance, though it was more than "a couple" of lines. It's quite true that the character was not on the following show (Jack was doing two a week when Canada Dry sponsored him in 1932-33) but returned the following week. Other than Mary when developed "a sore throat" or "the flu," which seemed to happen more often than anyone else in radio, she continued to be a regular character until she finally told Jack in the early '50s to let her stop appearing. She missed some weeks and the rest of the time she pre-recorded her lines, at times in an unenthusiastic monotone. The fake Mary may have been a fan. The real one was a very reluctant star.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:19](#)
Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



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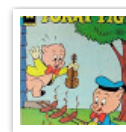
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to link and ebay.. -

<http://lewstringercomics.blogspot.com/2020/02/original-art-for-sale.html>

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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...

1 day ago

Blog Archive

► [2020](#) (215)

▼ [2019](#) (376)

► [December](#) (32)

► [November](#) (30)

▼ [October](#) (31)

[The Ghost of Burt Gillett](#)

[The Second Buzz Buzzard](#)

[Cat in a Guilted Cage](#)

[The Hams That Couldn't Be Cured Backgrounds](#)

[Why Helen Hayes Was Jigging](#)

[Frank Marsales](#)

[How an Old Brown Horse Walks](#)

[Mice See Cat](#)

[Mr. Wilson Wears a Dress](#)

[Anticipation](#)

[Mouth in Minnie the Moocher](#)

[Plain Speaking About Plainfield](#)

[Why We Like Cartoons](#)

[Takes of the 1920s](#)

[The Crook Jumped Over the Moon](#)

[Ethel and Yvonne](#)

[How to Turn a Car Inside Out](#)

[Follow the Bouncing Cop](#)

[Joan Benny on Her Dad](#)

[Bloody Woodpecker](#)

[Fishy Flivver Fable](#)

[The Birds of Pingo Pongo](#)

[Eve Arden on Teachers and Peepers](#)

[Colour and Mood](#)

[Dancing on Alligators](#)

[Not An Orchestra Enny](#)

[MGM's Non-Cartoon Animation Short](#)

[Dream Women in the Outpost](#)

[Buckaroo Bugs Backgrounds](#)

[Relaxing With Cranberries](#)

[Senorita of the Rubber Hose](#)

- [September](#) (31)
- [August](#) (32)
- [July](#) (31)
- [June](#) (30)
- [May](#) (32)
- [April](#) (31)
- [March](#) (31)
- [February](#) (30)
- [January](#) (35)

- [2018](#) (379)
- [2017](#) (380)
- [2016](#) (396)
- [2015](#) (389)

- [2014](#) (390)
- [2013](#) (388)
- [2012](#) (397)
- [2011](#) (106)

Labels

[Aline Mosby](#) (17)
[Art Davis](#) (33)
[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (9)
[Bob and Ray](#) (10)
[Bob Clampett](#) (82)
[Bob McKimson](#) (59)
[Bob Thomas](#) (53)
[Chuck Jones](#) (142)
[Columbia](#) (33)
[Counterfeit Cat](#) (8)
[Cynthia Lowry](#) (26)
[Dick Thomas](#) (14)
[Don Patterson](#) (17)
[Earl Wilson](#) (6)
[Erskine Johnson](#) (37)
[Felix the Cat](#) (27)
[Film Daily](#) (50)
[Fleischer](#) (154)
[Frank Tashlin](#) (24)
[Fred Allen](#) (43)
[Fred Brunish](#) (11)
[Friz Freleng](#) (137)
[Gene Deitch](#) (18)
[George Pal](#) (10)
[Grant Simmons](#) (4)
[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (99)
[Hanna-Barbera](#) (2)
[Harman-Ising](#) (61)
[Henry Morgan](#) (13)
[Irv Spence](#) (8)
[Jack Benny](#) (453)
[Jay Ward](#) (30)
[Jimmy Durante](#) (17)
[John Crosby](#) (84)
[John Sutherland](#) (28)
[Johnny Johnsen](#) (27)
[Kenny Baker](#) (6)
[King-Size Canary](#) (8)
[Laugh-In](#) (11)
[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)
[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)
[Magical Maestro](#) (9)
[Maurice Noble](#) (12)
[Mel-O-Toons](#) (4)
[MGM](#) (553)

Norm McCabe	(5)
Pat Matthews	(10)
Paul Julian	(13)
Paul Terry	(2)
Sara Berner	(5)
Screwy Squirrel	(34)
Spider-Man	(1)
Terrytoons	(84)
Tex Avery	(468)
Tom and Jerry Human	(29)
Trafaz Sunday Theatre	(17)
Ub Iwerks	(80)
UPA	(57)
Van Beuren	(94)
Vernon Scott	(42)
Virginia MacPherson	(14)
Walt Disney	(145)
Walter Lantz	(241)
Warner Bros.	(586)
Who Killed Who	(10)

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