



Sunday, 6 November 2022

## Rochester and Albuquerque

A stroke of genius wafted over the radio airwaves on March 28, 1937. The Jack Benny show included an incidental character who got laughter and applause. The reaction no doubt spurred Benny and his writers to find other situations for him. The character was an unnamed porter played by a film and stage actor named Eddie Anderson.

Finally, on June 20, the character now was employed by Benny and named Rochester. Because the show didn't always have an element of Jack's "home life" (it was stage-bound much of the time, like other comedy/variety shows), Rochester didn't always appear; in fact the Rochester character only showed up once before becoming somewhat regular at the end of the year. But Benny and the writers knew he had comic appeal. Eventually, a "phone call to the studio from Rochester" bit was included on the show to squeeze him in if there was no "home life" scenario that week.



Audiences came to love Rochester because he was the employee who constantly one-upped his boss, the same as the rest of the cast. He had the audacity to wear Jack's clothes, smoke his cigars and empty his fridge (and bar), and didn't seem too concerned he'd get caught, coming up with lame and funny explanations. As the show evolved into a sitcom after the war, he and his "boss" were like friends and mutually respected each other.

On that first appearance, there's a running gag where Rochester, the redcap, doesn't know anything about a train stop at Albuquerque. He thinks Jack has made up the name and won't take it seriously. The interesting thing is, like much of the Benny show, there was a touch of real life behind it. Jack *was* on a train that week and he *did* stop in Albuquerque two days before the Sunday broadcast. The *Albuquerque Tribune* of March 27 reported and made a revelation about the show. The Benny-Allen feud that started over "The Bee" ended on March 14th in New York. At least temporarily.

### Jack Benny Asserts He Can Play the Bee All Right

"What do you mean am I ever going to learn to play 'The Bee'? I already can play it. Improve? What's wrong with it the way it is?" Jack Benny queried defensively here yesterday afternoon.

Off the screen and off the air Jack Benny is a business man. Yesterday when he and Mary Livingston passed through here on the Chief his business was preparing his Sunday night's broadcast, in which, incidentally, Albuquerque will play a minor role.

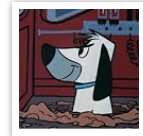
The program will be worked around Mr. Benny's train trip to Hollywood and the stop-over here will be used in the script which Mr. Benny is preparing en route. While here, he wired Hollywood to have train bells, whistles, escaping steam and other locomotive noises ready for the broadcast.

Aside from defending his musical accomplishments, Mr. Benny seemed to be taking life pretty seriously. He refused to take any stand on Fred Allen, except that contrary to rumors, he and Mr. Allen will not make a picture together in the near future at least.

Mr. Benny will, however, start work soon on "Artists and Models," a picture about which Mr. Benny knows no more than anybody else.

As a side note, it's interesting to see the show was still being written on Friday. NBC issued news releases promoting programmes and I've run into cases where the summary doesn't quite match what appeared on the

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Whip Up Some Cereal -  
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## Blogs to See

**The Exposure Sheet**  
The New (and Never Made) Flintstones Show - The Exposure Sheet is back after a little Labor Day break, and just as I promised, I introduce you to the first of several posts for what I call "Scrapped...  
57 minutes ago

**Cartoon Research**  
Let's Talk Terrytoons: Why We Don't See Them Anymore - My 30 years of trying to revive a mighty mouse, a pair of talking magpies and a very neurotic elephant.  
7 hours ago

air. I suspect this paragraph in the March 28 edition of the *Sunday Times* of New Brunswick, N.J. is from a release.

The opening portion of the program will be devoted to a dramatization of the cast's transcontinental railroad trip. Among the episodes to be covered will be the celebration of Jack Benny Day in Waukegan, a discussion of how the various members of the troupe spent their vacations in New York, a poker game, a dining-car sketch and an interlude with the conductor who thinks that Mary Livingstone ought to get a new straight-man.

Other than being on the train from Chicago, none of the rest of the above plot took place. There's a Yiddish dialect routine with Pat C. Flick and a routine with Verna Felton and Blanche Stewart involving a stage mother who coerces Jack to hear her operatic daughter. And there's Rochester.

Benny and cast made another train trip a year later and again stopped in Albuquerque. By then, Rochester was already known. The *Journal* interviewed Eddie Anderson and Jack for its March 28, 1938 edition.

### JACK BENNY'S "FIND" COMES BACK THROUGH TOWN THAT MADE HIM ON RADIO

The Negro boy who began his rise to radio renown by good-humored jibes at Albuquerque less than a year ago came back to town Tuesday morning on the Chief.

And also on and with Jack Benny.

And Eddie Anderson—Rochester, the Pullman porter, to you dial twisters—"ain't been so excited since I was colored."

While Eddie attempted to establish kinship with a group of Navajo Indians who toothily consented to pose for the cameramen, he paid his respects to Albuquerque.

"Do I remember this city, Boy, I'll never forget it as long as I live," said the ginger-cake boy with unfailing cheer. "It got me my big chance in radio. Say, I love everybody here."

In Eddie's first radio broadcast when he was "discovered" by Benny a year ago, it will be recalled that he tore off some gags not exactly calculated to flatter the finer sensibilities of the Chamber of Commerce.

#### Benny All Apologies

For instance, when Jack asked him, in the skit, "how far is Albuquerque," Rochester answered with mirthful impudence:

"Is dat on dis line? Shux. dey ain't no such a thing as Albuquerque."

When Jack persisted in plying the radio reporter with the question, Rochester was increasingly scornful.

"Lissen, dere he go again. Talkin' 'bout Albuquerque. He must be crazy."

As for Jack Benny, acclaimed by many as Radio Comedian Number One? And acclaimed by America's tailors as Well Dressed Man Number One?

He was all apologies. This was the first time he had ever failed to emerge from his stateroom in Albuquerque. He misunderstood the schedule and thought it was an hour earlier.

About this best dressed business. At ease in his bed, wearing horn-rimmed glasses, crinkled blue pajamas and a slight beard stubble, he said; graciously:

"Pshaw. There's not a man in my show that's not better dressed than I." I don't see where they get that. My recipe for being the best dressed? Just comb your hair, change shirts now and then, brush your teeth and shine your shoes, that's all."

#### Talks About Show

Jack preferred to talk about Rochester, his discovery. And his "radio show of shows," scheduled for New York next Sunday night.

The graying comedian expects to present, along with himself. Kate Smith, who will pinch hit for Mary Livingston, his wife; Fred Allen, his perennial "friendly enemy," Bob (Believe-It-Or-Not) Ripley and others. Mary stayed in Hollywood. So did Don Wilson, the announcer, who will be supplanted for the Sunday broadcast by Harry Vonzell.

What about Fred, now, Jack?

"O' I simply can't wait to get to New York and kick him in the pants," he chuckled. "Quite a citizen, that Allen."

What did he think of this year's awards of "Oscar?" (Hollywoodian for the Motion Picture Academy awards?)

"Very good, especially Spencer Tracy," he said. "However, I thought that Barbara Stanwyck should have been given more consideration for her work in "Stella Dallas."

Jack punctuated his observations with warm words of praise for the Santa Fe's Chief.

"Boy, this is the swellest train I ever rode. Yes, I used to fly, but I have about quit."

Jack Benny's last words to the reporter was a request to personally convey his thanks to the



### News From ME

**On a Brief Hiatus** - In case you haven't figured out, this blog is closed for a few days while I tend to matters that need tending-to and would be of no interest to anyone. I a...

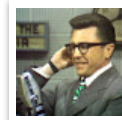
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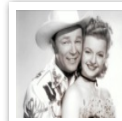


Gary Owens 1969 - . From the "familiar love theme"

to the ongoing silliness. Gary did some wonderful radio. Gery's last big job was the announcer on AntennaTV. On t...

1 day ago

### Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #240 - Hello my friends and welcome

back for another service of Cowboy Church. Today's musical selection begins with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans with "The Bible ...

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### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog

[The 2023 Cinecon Is On!](#) - \*Silent movie fans in Southern California, enjoy the return of the Cinecon! The 59th Cinecon will bring big screen fun to the Old Town Music Hall (home of... 4 days ago

### Mark Kausler's CatBlog

[Mabel's Cops](#) - This time out the "Now Listen, Mabel" strips are from 11-24 to 12-6-1919. Jimmie Doozinberry is jealous of Policeman Tom Walsh who turns out to be Mabel's ...

5 days ago

Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce.

"For that splendid letter they wrote me last year after Rochester put on his Albuquerque broadcast."

Perhaps it's significant that Anderson's quotes are in regular English but the Rochester dialogue is pure minstrel show. Rochester drawled for a while on the Benny show and he engaged in some stereotype behaviour (On one episode, he steals Ronald Colman's chickens. Why the dignified actor would own chickens defies explanation, except to draw on a tired racial stereotype). The Benny writers pretty much dropped it as time wore on.

Incidentally, where the paper got the Rochester dialogue from the show is a bit of a mystery. The broadcast in circulation is the West Coast version and it doesn't contain any of the lines above. And while Eddie Anderson appeared in Albuquerque in 1937, Rochester did not. That's because local station KOB didn't hook up with NBC until June 1937. Albuquerque fans of Jack had to hear him on KOA in Denver on Sundays at 9:30 p.m. In fact, KOB didn't even air the Benny show until April 24, 1938. Audiences got "Words and Music from Cheerio," an NBC Blue network show, before that.

It's a little difficult hunting for newspaper stories of Anderson's early days as Rochester. That's because there was another Eddie Anderson in Hollywood, an assistant director at Warner Bros. We found one with a Benny connection, once removed, in the Moline *Dispatch* of August 21, 1937. It praised Anderson's movie work (not mentioning radio), and revealed:

In *Over the Goal*, however, he's a college janitor boy who each year manages to wangle raccoon-skin coat from the freshmen who have the job of stealing a rival college's mascot—which is a big black bear. He's necessary because the bear knows and will mind him. Parenthetically, Eddie has been having troubles with the trained bear used, who is not vicious but playful!

It turns out Eddie had some experience to prepare him to be shoved into a scene with Carmichael the polar bear in *Buck Benny Rides Again*.

One other note about the debut of Rochester: Frank Nelson claimed that he was supposed to be the voice of the porter, but turned down the role because he had another commitment on the air so Anderson was hired. A look at the script for that episode says "Nelson" next to the lines for a redcap, but the broadcast has no other voice than Eddie Anderson's. It would appear Nelson was to be on the show but all the porter lines were consolidated into one character.

It turns out that Frank Nelson, indirectly, was partly responsible for the creation of one of the most popular characters in all of network radio.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:31](#)



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new blog, called The  
Golden Age of Animation,  
which I hope to be a  
Cartoon Research-like  
place for a bunch of writers,  
mainly me, the head w...  
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