

Wednesday, 9 April 2025

Join the Bath Club

Before walking on stage and making people laugh, Fred Allen was an employee of the Boston Public Library. That's where his scrapbooks were willed after his death.

Time has not been too kind to them. Glue stains adorn the newspaper clippings. Some are torn. The print is faded. Some appear to be missing parts of stories. On top of that, Allen (or whoever) labelled almost none of them.

At one time, a library was the most accessible way of doing research. However, the internet has made discoveries almost miraculous.

Kathy Fuller-Seeley took the time to photograph Allen's scrapbooks. There were two versions of one article, unsourced. Being scrapbooks, there is a gutter between pages and cannot be folded out flat, so copy is in the shadows. It would be almost impossible to transcribe, and that would be typing word-by-word.



However, we have the internet today. A web search of some of the text of the article revealed nothing. But a search of the author's name revealed a story penned for a specific radio magazine with the same format as the Allen feature. There's a wonderful site called worldradiohistory.com which has scans of old radio magazines. A search of Allen's name through the particular publication resulted in finding a full copy of the story, sans glue, with accompanying photos.

With that lengthy preface, we bring you an article on Fred Allen's show published in *Radio Stars* of February 1933. This is a look at Allen's first shot at radio, *The Linit Bath Club Revue*, which aired on CBS from Oct. 23, 1932 to Apr. 16, 1933. This was a good ten years before Allen's best-known work, Allen's Alley with Senator Claghorn, Mrs. Nussbaum and so on.

The episode mentioned below is not available on the internet that I can find. Allen reused concepts, and this one re-appeared on the *Sal Hepatica Revue* in 1934.

BACKSTAGE AT BROADCAST

By OGDEN MAYER

WANT to join the Bath Club? Want to mingle with the mystic Inner Circle of Fred Allen's festive fraternity? Would a laugh do you good? Then walk right in, ladeez and gents. There is no charge, no price of admission. Just three things do we ask. You must not talk, you must not smoke, and you must not leave the studio until the program is over.

The Linit Bath Club is easy to join. Just take a bath the Linit way and you're in. Have I? Sh-h-h-h! I haven't, but that won't keep us out. Come on!

We're in the CBS building on Manhattan's amazing Madison Avenue. The big reception room on the top floor is chock-a-block with visitors. Ladies in orchids and ermine, men in their most formal dds. It is just 8:45 p.m. E. S. T., Sunday. "Hey, page! Where's the Linit Bath Room?"

He leads us up a flight [sic] of stairs. A massive door swings open and a wave of sound rolls out. The orchestra is still rehearsing, actors are speling their lines. This is the studio, jammed with chairs and music racks and mikes. Other people are coming in, chattering, surrendering their precious tickets to

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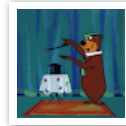


March 1939
Part 1 -
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and more
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greeted

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3 days ago

Yowp



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in one of

those cartoons-between-the-cartoons on the "Huckleberry Hound Show". *Alakazam, Alagazoom Come out, little bear, ...

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6 hours ago

the boy in blue.

Two girls, sub-deb age, pop their great big, round eyes through the door.

"I'll die if I don't see Rudy Vallee."

"Sit-h-h, you scrunch. He works for the other network."

An imaginary line splits this biggest of CBS studios down the center. A grand piano sits squarely astride it. The musicians are ranked beyond. On this side is the crowd. To our left, in a corner cozily close to a picket fence of mikes, are a dozen chairs. *Our* chairs.

"These are for the press and special guests," a thin chap explains. "The others are for the hoi polloi." A PAGE looks at him and says, "Anybody who gets into *this* broadcast isn't any hoi polloi, mister. He's darn lucky." Grab a seat and cling to it. The other pews across the aisle are filling rapidly. Look! See the stocky man with the black mustache. That's Jack Smart, radio actor. We'll see him in action.

The clock says 9:50 p. m. Ten minutes to go. Who's the stout chap on the box leading the orchestra? Name of Louis Katzman. Actually, *the* Louis Katzman. Can I help it if he looks like he's been in a wrestling match with Strangler Lewis? That's one of Louis' failings. You can dress him fresh from shirt to sox and press his pants ten times a day. Five minutes after he puts them on, they wilt. And look like a Heywood Broun suit. Katzman's a great guy, though.

"I'll never be the same," he shouts for no apparent reason. Fred Allen slides through, the door, sober-faced, looking a little like Cousin Ezra come to town for the Hog Fair. He carries a sheaf of papers.



(Above, left) Tongue-twisters don't mean a thing . . . I mean don't think a mean . . . er-r-r, don't mean a thing to gis dui . . . er, this Roy mean a thing to gis dui . . . er, this guy Roy Atwill. (Above, right) that rather stoutish chap is Jack Smart—he's being tickled (read about it in the story) and is making it seem realistic.

The door of the control room opens and a half-dozen persons stride through. They all carry papers, too. Sit straight, you. They're the Inner Circle of this Bath Club. They put on the show.

The tall, slim chap with the pointed moustache is the director. Fred Allen collars him as he passes us. He says. "But what's the harm in those four words?"

We don't get the answer, but here is a hint. That plaintive query from Broadway's Mister Allen is a tip-off to the situation that is almost every radio performer's pain-in-the-neck. I mean air censorship. It's a harmless sort of restriction imposed by the broadcasters themselves but when some gagster sees his favorite pun blue-penciled, he usually burns. Just now, Allen isn't burning, but he isn't pleased either, I'll bet.

Time is sliding by. Performers are getting into their front row seats beyond the mikes. The loudspeaker brings din of music into the studio. It is the preceding program. Suddenly it stops. The director faces the control room and sings out, "Quiet, please." The voice of the radio says a polite, "This is the Columbia Broadcasting System."

The director's arm is now held straight over his head as he watches the engineer through the control room window. Louis Katzman, whose back is to the window, watches the director. Seconds tick past. No one breathes. The director's arm cuts air. Katzman strokes violently. Music leaps from two dozen instruments.

A MAN at a mike begins to talk. Dark, saturnine Kenneth Roberts, the announcer . . . "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We welcome you to the Linit Bath Club. . . ." He fades back.

A swarm of violinists and clarinetists gather about a mike just below Katzman. He leads them into a lively tempo. But look yonder. The musician coming tip from the last orchestra row wears a battered, brown fedora on the end of his trumpet. He places it near a microphone and blows amazing, sugary

The Exposure Sheet



[The Boomerang Website Over the Years](#) - In the 2000s,

you couldn't have a kids' TV channel without an accompanying website. Boomerang was no exception, but it was a little different than most. R...

7 hours ago

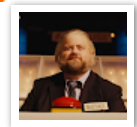
Cartoon Research

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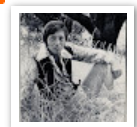
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[Felix and the Dooits](#) -

Howdy Folks, Here's the Felix strip from 12-4 to 12-17-1932. Felix is settling in to the Dooit home in the dailies, which results in gags featuring Felix t...

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Serial? *Charlie Tuna - 1985* More Charlie Tuna

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notes.

At the end of the song, another tall dark chap steps forward. (Why are all these tall and dark fellows?) Fred Allen is the shortest of the lot—and he's not a small man by any means—except for Katzman. This is Master of Ceremonies Webster. [sic] Van Vorhees or Hugh Conrad. He plays the radio theatres under both names and you've probably heard him plenty. He's introducing Fred Allen, setting the scene for tonight's celebration to the water gods and the appointments of the bath.

Charles Carlile steps up and sings a solo. He is no crooner. You can hear his words clear to the back of the room. A skit. Then, more music until the clock hands stand at 9:12.

Katzman has earphones over his ears, red-rubber padded. The orchestra is quiet. The big room grows tense. Katzman's hands wave vaguely, indicating a tempo. His musicians watch but no one plays.

Minutes pass. Through the closed, thick studio door, we hear faintest of faint organ strains from the loudspeaker in the reception room. Katzman suddenly gives a signal. The orchestra swings into a

phrase, stops, starts anew and slows to Katzman's imperative signal. Do you get it? This is Ann Leaf's selection. She is playing in the Paramount Building miles across town. Here, the orchestra is chiming in with incidental music, directed by Katzman's waving hands. He hears Ann through those earphones. Down there, she is wearing earphones, too, and she hears his orchestra as it swings in—to her song. In that wise though separated by half a city they are able to play together.

THE number is over and we have another introduction. We learn that Fred Allen is a warden in charge of a prison. We learn in an amazing fashion that his prison is the most popular in the country. Visitors come from all the world seeking admittance. One is an Englishman. There he is . . . see, there! The British yoke—the broad a, the pip-pip, toodle-oo accent.

But who is it? The guy is that same Webster Van Vorhees or Hugh Conrad that acted as an honest American a moment ago. Now he makes arrangements for murdering his mater-in-law so he can secure the best room in the popular prison. As he leaves, he remembers that he hasn't a gun. So Warden Allen loans him his.

Notice how that dry, hay-in-his-hair voice of Allen's lends an added punch to everything he utters? Makes his lines doubly funny? But get this . . . look at those girls. They're actresses hired by Mr. Linit to represent club-women who are intent on investigating the horrors of the third degree.

"We don't maltreat our prisoners," Allen assures them. "We kill them with kindness."

To prove it, he brings in a prisoner who testifies. He is a dapper, brown-suited little fellow, the sort of chap you'd find in a Park Avenue salon. Bostonish looking with a Harvard accent, I'll bet. But he gives his answers in purest Bowery stumble-bum language. Tough talk, believe you me. Well, you've got to learn never to be surprised in this radio business.

Next, Warden Allen demonstrates his third degree. He orders in an extra hard-berled prisoner for the test. And the prisoner is roly-poly Jack Smart. He is forced to eat and eat and eat, things like chocolate sundaes and apple pies. That is Allen's kill-'em-with-kind-ness third degree. In imagination, Smart is stuffed until he is ready to burst.

"Tell where you hid them poils" demands Warden Allen. "No," says Smart. "Feed him another sundae," is the order.

Smart howls and protests. He stuffs his fingers into his mouth, the first three of his right hand. His talk flows around them into the mike. Try it on your own digits some time. It sounds exactly as if you're talking with your mouth full. But still he won't tell where he hid them poils.

"Then we'll give him the works," says Allen. The hardened trusty shudders. "You mean . . . *tickle* him?"

SO the trusty starts to tickle Jack Smart. And this is where Jack begins to act. Hold your chair if you're nervous. Jack is twisting, giggling, screaming, making funny faces, going through all the antics of a touchy fellow in the throes of his favorite torture. Yet, not a finger is touching him.

"Stop, he-he-he. I can't stand it, he-he-he. Stop . . . whoops!"

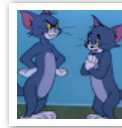
The whole studio is holding its sides. Everyone is gurgling and gushing, wiping tears front eyes. In a veritable paroxysm of tickling, Jack breaks.

"I'll tell, tee-hee, I'll confess every-thing if you'll stop. Hee, hee . . . hee-bee wheeee!"

So he tells all about them poils.

As he fades back from the mike, still laughing, still writhing from imaginary tickling, he staggers to an unused bench near us. Sweat bathes his face. He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, wipes it, and heaves a Golly-I'm-glad-that's-over sigh.

Tom and Jerry: Toon by Toon

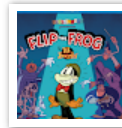


Timid Tabby (1957) - By the time of *Timid Tabby*, the theatrical

Tom and Jerry shorts greatly resembled the TV work that William Hanna and Joseph Barbera would soon be c...

1 day ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Even In Cartoons, The Great Depression was no Hap-Hap-

Happy Day - 4 days ago

Pegbar Profiles



The Animator, January 1938 - The second issue of

The Animator is missing as of this writing, so here is the third edition from the start of January 1938.

*Snow White *had its Ca...

5 months ago

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(Above, left) Here's Fred Allen himself. That nice-looking piece of femininity with him is his partner in comedy and, incidentally, his partner in real life. Her name is Portland Hoffa. (Above, right) Taken during the rehearsal of the Fred Allen Linit Bath Club. Behind those windows is where the sound controller sits.

Music again. A quartet and Charles Carlile. As they sing, a man runs out of the control room, puts his hand over the shoulders of two of the quartet and shoves Carlile ten inches closer to the mike. Glancing hastily through the window at the engineer, he reaches for Carlile again and drags him back four inches. After that, his work well done evidently, he saunters off to a corner and chews his lips.

The hour is almost over. Funny, this sense of something impending. Everyone seems to be increasingly nervous. They look at watches and embrace like long lost brothers for the mere purpose of whispering to each other without the sound filtering to a nearby mike.

Fred takes his manuscript, looks at it, and reads, "Good night."

Ken Roberts leans his tall form over a black tube and states, "Your announcer, Kenneth Roberts."

Charles Carlile comes on the run from his corner. Legs apart, hands in pockets, he steadies himself and sings. The Bath Club theme song is on the air.

Look at that minute marker on the studio clock. It is nearly at the half-hour mark. There! It passes. Katzman drops his hands. The program director waves to the crowd. A discordant blast blurts from every instrument in the orchestra. It grates, like a fingernail drawn along a tile. That's a trick those musicians have. At the end of every broadcast, when the "off the air" signal hits them, they blow the first note they can think off. It sounds like a lunatic's band. Seconds later, they are packing their instruments and going home.

And that's our next stop, too. So, good-night, all. You're now members of Fred Allen's Linit Bath Club. Don't forget next Sunday night.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:06](#)


Labels: [Fred Allen](#)

3 comments:

Errol 9 April 2025 at 10:15

Love the photos of these professionals in action. Such a great period in time to be on the radio.

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 **Yowp** 9 April 2025 at 12:27

I'm floored about how ratty that network rehearsal studio is.

[Reply](#)

Larynxa 9 April 2025 at 14:05

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Roy *Atwell* (not "Atwill") voiced Doc (who was spoon to pronerisms) in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs".

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