

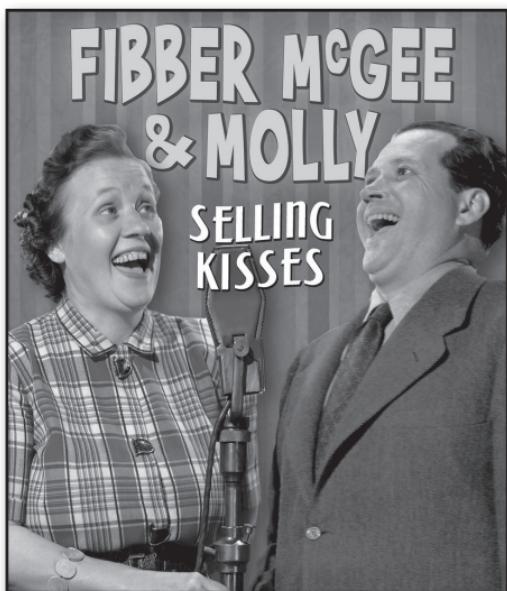
FIBBER McGEE & MOLLY

Selling Kisses

Program Guide by Ivan G. Shreve, Jr.

On February 15, 1949, Fibber and Molly McGee (Jim and Marian Jordan) spent practically the entire day looking for an address: 1414 14th Street. However, their search yielded no results, owing to the frustrating fact that many of the houses in town had no numbers on the outside. Informed that there would be a city council meeting that evening, Mr. and Mrs. McGee decided to discuss this pressing issue during the session. After waiting for nearly two hours for the 8:30pm assembly, the McGees made the acquaintance of Ole Swenson, the city hall janitor. Ole tells the couple that the event has been postponed. When Fibber asks why he and Molly weren't informed of this change in plans, the custodian replies that he *did* try to drop by with a message. He just couldn't locate radio's most famous address because "it ain't got no *numbers* on the house!"

That was the inaugural meet-and-greet between Ole and the McGees...and there would be many more to follow. Mr. Swenson left Wistful Vista City Hall and



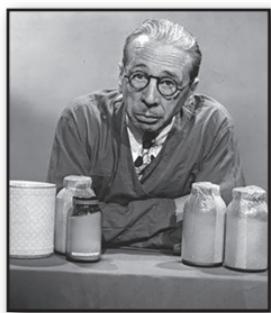
started work at the Elks' Club (Fibber's home away from home). Ole would soon be a weekly presence on *The Johnson's Wax Program with Fibber McGee & Molly*, played to sheer comic perfection by actor Richard LeGrand.

Dick LeGrand was born outside Portland, Oregon in 1882. At 16, he left home to become a sailor, spending several years sailing to England, Ireland, and the Orient. It was while walking the streets of New York City, unemployed and hungry at age 19, that LeGrand

would chance upon his future profession. Strolling past the Bijou Theatre, Dick was asked if he'd like to earn \$1.50. His job was to operate an artificial snow machine during a production of the wintery melodrama *The Climbers*. A short time thereafter, Dick was pressed into substituting for a missing actor...and the acting bug bit.

LeGrand soon found himself playing juvenile roles in various productions, moving on to jobs in theatrical aggregations like the Murray Hill Stock Company and, once back in Oregon, the Dillon & King repertory company. Dick's specialty was musical comedies, but he also worked in vaudeville and tent shows. LeGrand got in on radio's ground floor in San Francisco in 1928 as an announcer on the *Spotlight Revue* program. He would later handle the announcing chores on *Pacific Vagabonds* as well. Dick was "Pa Smithers" on *Memory Lane*, "Professor Knucklebine" on *School Days*, and (in a preview of his later *Fibber McGee and Molly* gig) starred in *Ole and the Girls*. (LeGrand was Ole—the "girls" were a female trio known as The Coquettes.)

Richard LeGrand soon acquired a reputation as one of the best radio character actors on the Pacific Coast. He began to get work on network programs like *The Lux Radio Theatre* and Carlton E. Morse's *One Man's Family* and *I Love a Mystery*. Dick's most prominent gig was on *The Great Gildersleeve* (a spin-off from *Fibber McGee and Molly*) as milquetoast pharmacist J.W. Peavey. LeGrand became a fan favorite as he meekly offered ineffectual advice to the program's titular character, water commissioner Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve (played by Harold Peary and Willard Waterman). Dick was so well identified as Peavey that he played the druggist on *Summerfield Bandstand* (a summer replacement program for *Gildersleeve*) and reprised the role in three of the four R-K-O films based on the radio show: *Gildersleeve's Bad Day* (1943), *Gildersleeve on Broadway* (1943), and *Gildersleeve's Ghost* (1944).



Dick LeGrand

On *The Great Gildersleeve*, Dick LeGrand's Peavey introduced a catchphrase that is still fondly remembered and quoted today (thanks to surviving *Gildersleeve* broadcasts and Warner Bros. cartoons): "Well, now...I wouldn't say that." With his portrayal of Ole on *Fibber McGee and Molly*, LeGrand would soon introduce another expression into the American lexicon. Grousing about his lot in life, he would complain (in his Swedish dialect): "I'm yust *donatin'* my time." Though the dialect humor hasn't aged

particularly well, it was quite popular at the time that the character of Ole was introduced. (Comedian El Brendel made a cottage industry of portraying what Leonard Maltin once described as “a simple-minded Swede with finesse.”) There was truly little malice to LeGrand’s Ole, however -- he was a hard-working individual (gainfully employed, in contrast to ne’er-do-well Fibber), and fiercely devoted to his wife Helga and offspring Lars, Nels, Sven, and Kristina.

Richard LeGrand wasn’t the only new regular to join the cast of *Fibber McGee and Molly* at this juncture. The program also welcomed back Cliff Arquette, who had made many appearances on the show in the 1930s. (Arquette was the first actor to play The Old Timer, before Bill Thompson grabbed the character and ran with it.) When Cliff rejoined the show, he played The Old Timer’s often-referenced girlfriend Bessie for a few broadcasts. He would become better known for emoting as a series of peculiar strangers that Fibber and Molly would encounter during their weekly misadventures. These individuals had different (and colorful) names, like “Fansworth Crandledance” and “Axelrod P. Baker.”

Bud Stephan began making appearances on *Fibber McGee and Molly* as a variety of telegram messengers and delivery boys -- but he also gave voice to Milt Spilkt, nephew to Ed Kramer, who owned Wistful Vista’s drugstore (on the corner of 14th and Oak). And to fill the void left by the dear, departed Abigail “Uppy” Uppington (Isabel Randolph) and Millicent “Carsty” Carstairs (Bea Benaderet), character great Elvia Allman took on the responsibility of portraying various snooty society matrons. She could be heard as “Miss Rhoda Dendron” and “Mrs. Heinz” (of 57 Varieties Avenue).

The new additions to the show’s cast meshed flawlessly with the old regulars. Bill Thompson was still convulsing listeners with his portrayals of The Old Timer (“That’s pretty good, Johnny...but that ain’t the way I heared it!”) and Wallace Wimple (“Hello, folks...”). Gale Gordon’s Mayor Charles La Trivia was always good for one solid stack-blowing per broadcast. In addition, La Trivia was busy for a time vying for the affections of actress Fifi Tremaine. His competition? None other than Arthur Q. Bryan’s Dr. George Gamble, who found time to engage in this rivalry without neglecting his weekly rounds of verbal sparring with the squire of 79 Wistful Vista. (Fibber took great delight in getting the two suitors to square off against one another.) Finally, announcer Harlow Wilcox continued to do the job for which he was hired: sell the dickens out of Johnson’s Wax.



Cliff Arquette

Since its debut on April 16, 1935, *The Johnson's Wax Program with Fibber McGee & Molly* was not only one of the National Broadcasting Company's most popular comedy programs, but its relationship with its sponsor was one of the sturdiest and longest-running in radio. During World War II, Fibber and Molly assumed responsibility for boosting the morale of Americans on the home front, encouraging listeners to purchase war bonds and plant victory gardens. For their good works, the Jordans were rewarded with audience numbers that kept their program nestled at the top of the Hooper ratings.

The show's post-War standings, however, demonstrated that while *Fibber McGee and Molly* was still popular as a Tuesday night institution, its audience was starting to look elsewhere. No entertainment program can run forever and, despite the consistently witty scripts provided by writers Don Quinn and Phil Leslie, some believed that the show was relying too heavily on formula. (Quinn, who was instrumental in the creation of the program, was turning more of the writing duties over to Leslie at this time so that he could concentrate on *The Halls of Ivy*.) Radio was also starting to cede its dominance as a medium to its attention-grabbing younger sibling, television.

Johnson's Wax was most interested in getting into television...but the Jordans weren't quite sold on the idea. They were convinced that the cathode ray tube didn't have much to offer a show that worked best in "the theatre of the mind." As Charles Stumpf and Tom Price noted in their invaluable reference *Heavenly Days! The Story of Fibber McGee and Molly*: "The key elements being the famous closet door gag and the very concept of Wistful Vista as 'Anywhere Middle America, U.S.A.', with its jumbled geography and the host of outlandish characters played by a mere handful of actors, all of which constituted a program uniquely suited to radio. A show that possibly could not, and most likely would not, lend itself to the revealing eye of the television camera."

Johnson's Wax was certainly willing to pony up some Glo-Coat money (\$10,000) for a Fibber and Molly TV pilot featuring, of course, the Jordans, Harlow Wilcox, Bill Thompson, Gale Gordon, Arthur Q. Bryan, Billy Mills and his Orchestra, and The King's Men. (The concept included scripts and microphones like a regular radio broadcast.) However, the proposed project didn't progress very far. Fib and Molly wouldn't make it to small screens until the fall of 1959, with actors Bob Sweeney and Cathy Lewis as the couple at 79 Wistful Vista. (The show would be gone before the end of January the following year.)

Johnson's and the Jordans amicably parted, with the company continuing their foray into TV (they sponsored *Robert Montgomery Presents*) and Fibber and Molly welcoming a new backer in Pet Milk. No longer would Fib refer to announcer Wilcox as "Waxy"; Harlow's new nickname was "Milky," and he even started to be jokingly addressed as "Harlow Milkox."

The following Johnson's Wax/Pet Milk programs originally aired over NBC and star Jim and Marian Jordan as Fibber McGee & Molly. The supporting players include Arthur Q. Bryan (as Dr. George Gamble), Gale Gordon (as Mayor Charles LaTrivia), Bill Thompson (as Wallace Wimple and The Old Timer), Richard LeGrand (as Ole), Bud Stephan (as Milt), Cliff Arquette, Elvia Allman, and announcer Harlow Wilcox. Music is by The King's Men and Billy Mills and His Orchestra.

CD 1A: "Bowling Finals" – 11/16/48

Fibber needs a bowling partner when Wallace Wimple is forced to bow out (thanks to his "big ol' wife"). As a bit of a radio "in-joke", the name of the establishment where McGee bowls is "Allen's Alley." Billy Mills' orchestra performs "Buttons and Bows" and the King's Men sing "Bella Bella Marie." Herb Vigran is heard in this episode.

CD 1B: "Doc's Pheasants" – 11/23/48

Doc Gamble brings over three pheasants to be eaten by himself, Fibber, and Molly. McGee takes it upon himself to prepare the feast...using some modeling clay he finds in the hall closet. Billy Mills' orchestra plays "Every Day I Love You (Just a Little Bit More)" and the King's Men perform "I've Got a Hundred-and-Sixty Acres."

CD 2A: "Street Light Is Out" – 11/30/48

The streetlight at 79 Wistful Vista has burned out, so McGee prepares to battle City Hall for its repair. Frustrated by the slow response, Fibber enlists the help of the Old Timer to change the bulb. Billy Mills' orchestra performs "Slow Boat to China" and the King's Men sing "Stick-to-it-ivity."



Herb Vigran

CD 2B: “Forgets To Order Furnace Oil” – 01/04/49

Fibber picks the wrong time to be out of furnace oil, what with sub-zero weather outside. There's also a draft under the front door...but he'll soon fix that. Billy Mills' orchestra plays “Cuanto La Gusta” and the King's Men perform “Saskatchewan.”

CD 3A: “Organizing A Sleigh Ride” – 01/11/49

With three feet of snow on the ground, Fibber and Molly reminisce about sleigh rides in their Peoria days. McGee decides to organize one and opens the hall closet during his preparations. Billy Mills' orchestra performs “Lavender Blue” and the King's Men sing “A Little Bird Told Me.” Herb Vigran is heard in this episode.

CD 3B: “Old Jalopy” – 03/01/49

There's an abandoned (and dilapidated) 1925 sedan parked outside 79 Wistful Vista. How will Fibber and Molly get rid of it? Billy Mills' orchestra plays “Brush Those Tears From Your Eyes” and the King's Men perform “It's What You Do With What You Got.” Bea Benaderet is heard in this episode.

CD 4A: “Doc Gamble Day” – 03/15/49

It's “Doc Gamble Day” in Wistful Vista! There's going to be a parade, a testimonial dinner...and constant reminders from Fibber that he came up with the idea in the first place. Billy Mills' orchestra performs “Red Roses for a Blue Lady” and the King's Men sing “E-O-I-O-Ho.”

CD 4B: “At Kramer's Drug Store” – 04/05/49

Mistaken for Kramer the druggist, McGee attempts to put money in the register after a sale. When the cash drawer sticks, it's Fibber to the rescue! Billy Mills' orchestra plays “Great Guns” and the King's Men perform “Lavender Blue.”



Gale Gordon and Bea Benaderet

CD 5A: “Fibber Buys A Pipe” – 04/12/49

The squire of 79 Wistful Vista has acquired a new pipe. It was completely free -- a premium with the purchase of three pounds of “Old Mustard Mouth” tobacco! Billy Mills' orchestra performs “No Orchids for My Lady” and the King's Men sing “If You Stub Your Toe on the Moon.”

CD 5B: “Housework On A Schedule” – 04/26/49

Fibber tries to convince Molly that her housework can be done more efficiently on a schedule. And he's

just the man who can demonstrate! Billy Mills' orchestra plays "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair" and the King's Men perform "I Want to Marry Mary."

CD 6A: "Big Fish Feed" – 09/27/49

Wallace Wimple is bringing over some fish to 79 Wistful Vista. Sounds like Fibber and Molly need to invite the gang over for a fish fry! Billy Mills' orchestra performs "Fiddle Dee Dee" and the King's Men sing a medley of "Ichabod/Katrina."

CD 6B: "Umbrella Stand" – 10/04/49

It's a beautiful autumn day, but the original "Fall guy" will be spending it at the Bon Ton. Fibber and Molly need to return an umbrella stand that they didn't order. Billy Mills' orchestra plays "Toot Toot Tootsie" and the King's Men perform "Busy Doin' Nothin'."

CD 7A: "Cloth From Paper" – 10/11/49

Anyone can make paper out of cloth, but Fibber McGee is a true visionary. He plans to make cloth out of paper! Billy Mills' orchestra performs "Laurabelle Lee" and the King's Men sing "Mischa, Jascha, Toscha, Sascha."

CD 7B: "Selling Kisses" – 10/18/49

Guess who's going to man the Community Chest Bazaar kissing booth? None other than "Lipstick Remover" McGee! Fibber borrows Molly's "Heavenly Days!" catchphrase. Billy Mills' orchestra plays "It's a Great Feeling" and the King's Men perform "That Lucky Old Sun (Just Rolls Around Heaven All Day)."

CD 8A: "Fibber The Census Taker" – 04/04/50

Fibber's got a job as a census enumerator. It's the ideal gig for someone incapable of keeping his nose out of other people's affairs. Billy Mills' orchestra performs "If I Knew You Were Comin' (I'd-a Baked a Cake)" and the King's Men sing "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You." Elvia Allman is heard in this episode.

CD 8B: "Elks' Club Dance" – 04/25/50

Fibber is really throwing himself into organizing the Elks' Club Dance. All he needs is a suitable candidate for the guest-of-honor! Billy Mills' orchestra plays "Candy and Cake" and the King's Men perform "Dearie." Jean Vander Pyl and Elvia Allman are heard in this episode.



Elvia Allman

CD 9A: “The Fishing Trip” – 05/02/50

It's "Opening Day" at Dugan's Lake and the bass are running like noses in flu season. Fibber is taking a scientific approach to fishing this year. Billy Mills' orchestra performs "Willhemina" and the King's Men sing "The Old Piano Roll Blues."



Jim and Marian Jordan

CD 9B: “Circus Day” – 05/09/50

It's "Circus Day" in Wistful Vista! Fibber and Molly plan to attend the parade and then make their way to the fun underneath the Big Top. Billy Mills' orchestra plays appropriate circus music and the King's Men perform "The Hoop-Dee-Doo."

CD 10A: “Picnic In The Orchard – 05/16/50

Fibber and Molly have a splendid picnic planned. If only they could locate the proper venue! Billy Mills' orchestra performs Billy's own "Cornball Rag" and the King's Men sing "Home Cookin'."

CD 10B: “The Chicken Bar-B-Q” – 09/19/50

Everyone is invited to 79 Wistful Vista for a chicken barbecue! The first show of the 1950-51 season and the first to be sponsored by Pet Milk. Billy Mills' orchestra plays "I Love the Guy" and the King's Men perform "The Picnic Song."



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