

Frank Bresee Radio Archives  
Frank Bresee (b. 1929; d. 2018)

### Bresee's Early Career

Frank Bresee began his radio archive collection in 1939. This collection became one of the world's largest private holdings. He began collecting radio items at an early age. At age 10 Frank attended radio station KFAC with his classmates for a tour. A week later, on his own, Frank went to the station and asked for an acting job on the show. He immediately became a radio actor. Three years later he was part of the "Red Ryder Show" as one of the "Little Beavers." He continued on the show from 1942-1946.

Then in 1946 he interviewed major radio and entertainment stars on a Hollywood radio station. When he was 19, Frank created and owned his first radio station, KISL, located on Santa Catalina Island, California. On August 5, 1949, he started "The Golden Days of Radio" which is still being heard. From the late 60s to the mid-90s, "The Golden Days of Radio" was broadcast on 400 radio stations around the world. "The Golden Days of Radio" features interviews, documentaries, and the history of radio during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

Growing up in Hollywood, Frank became acquainted with and knew many entertainment industry performers, personalities, and executives. At that time, he worked with Johnny Grant, a long-time disc jockey on KMPC AM in Los Angeles. Johnny's radio show was broadcast from a Hollywood restaurant, "Ham and Egger." Frank assisted Johnny at the restaurant with his interviews, and then Frank played records during the early morning hours. Johnny later became Hollywood's Honorary Mayor, and he was the host of the Hollywood Walk of Fame program. In 1950, Johnny Grant introduced Frank to Bob Hope. Frank then travelled with Bob Hope in the United States recording Bob's radio shows and movie premiers. These spots were used at various radio stations.

### The Bresee Archives Began as a Personal Endeavor

Bresee's accumulation of materials expanded to include items beyond his personal involvement. It included a broad range of materials of the era from other actors and production personnel in Hollywood including such items as radio scripts, original 16-inch radio transcription discs, and later reel-to-reel tapes.

His radio archives, one of the world's largest private collections, was stored at his 8,600 sq. ft. Hancock Park California home. Frank built a home movie theater in its basement. The theater was decked out with 30 movie seats, a screen, and a projector. Numerous movie stars attended screenings there including Elvis Presley, Natalie Wood, Mel Torme, and others. Many of those stars left their autographed signature on a huge chalkboard located near the movie seats.

Today, this home is currently owned by rock 'n roll's Ozzy Osbourne, inductee of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (2024 class). The chalkboard remains in that home's movie theater today. This neighborhood includes the house used for the 1960s "Batman" TV show.

Frank's movie theater was used by Hollywood personalities as they practiced and polished their TV pilots in private before submitting them to the major networks. The TV show "Let's Make a Deal" with Monty Hall did six months of multiple run-throughs there before it was submitted to the networks.

Bresee's radio collection became well-known in Hollywood circles. Movie studios and radio stations contacted Frank to obtain radio related items and recordings. In fact, Walt Disney gave Frank a hand-drawn Lifetime Disney pass, complete with a Mickey Mouse portrait and signed by Walt, in exchange for Frank's 1938 photo of Walt doing his radio show.

#### Bresee's Unique Film Archives of Radio Performances

Frank's career fostered a wide range of opportunities which resulted in the documentation of the era in a manner others were not able to do. He photographed radio rehearsals, filmed radio shows and re-creations, and produced entertainment specials that were issued as record albums, TV and radio specials.

During the 1946 radio season, Frank attended the "Lux Radio Theater" rehearsal and photographed movie stars holding on to "Radio Oscar." "Radio Oscar" was a special device designed by legendary film producer, Cecil B. DeMille. DeMille was the host of "Lux Radio Theater" series. "Radio Oscar" was a handrail in the form of a small tower that gave film actors something to hold onto in order to reduce their anxiety about performing live on radio. Eventually, Frank acquired "Radio Oscar" and displayed it in his radio studio along with his personal photographs of the stars holding on to "Radio Oscar."

Frank started filming radio broadcasts and radio re-creations in Hollywood studios. He traveled to Chicago to film the radio show "The Breakfast Club." "The Breakfast Club" was one of radio's most successful daily programs for 35 years. The show entertained millions as they started their day before school, work, and all their household activities.

He also filmed radio re-creations including "Tom Mix," a beloved radio western and "The Golden Days of Christmas" special. Frank was nominated for an Emmy for his 1977 TV special "The Golden Days of Radio" that aired on the CBS television network.

In the 1960s, Frank produced three LP record albums about the lives of Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor and Jimmy Durante. Walter Winchell, the famous radio/TV personality, was the host of the Al Jolson record. Winchell's promotion of the LP in his legendary newspaper column the week of release resulted in the sale of 50,000 records.

Eddie Cantor's album was hosted by Georgie Jessell, a Broadway star and film producer and was known as America's toastmaster for his hosting of numerous events involving celebrities. He was considered the most sought-after-dinner speaker in America. The album about Jimmy Durante was also hosted by Walter Winchell. Jimmy recorded the piano bridges for the album in Bresee's home on Frank's piano.

In 1972, Frank produced a 12-hour "Birthday Special" for KFI radio, one of the most important stations in the radio era. The show featured 24 stars from the entertainment industry who talked about their careers. He also played highlights from their shows.

Over the years, Bresee acquired rights and licenses for many broadcast properties. He licensed his vast radio recordings to TV and radio show producers and documentarians around the world.

Producers of retrospectives that included the film "Gone with the Wind" for example, worked with Frank because Frank had the best scenes and images with all of the proper legal clearances. Frank had other interests as well. These included TV game shows and board games. He created several original board games: "Pass Out," still available world-wide and has sold over 6 million copies. He also developed the board game TV shows "The Dating Game" and the "Newlywed Game."

Frank was part of the production executive team for Ralph Edward's TV show "Truth or Consequences." Working on TV game shows inspired him to begin his own independent advertising agency providing TV game show prizes. He founded a company monitoring TV advertising for sponsors. Frank produced several game show pilots that led him to discover game show personality, Vanna White. Like many stories of Hollywood stars being discovered by happenstance, he found her contact information from an employee at a gasoline station. For six months, he helped train her in developing a comfortable stage presence before she joined the highly successful "Wheel of Fortune" game show, a position she has had for more than 40 years.

Frank Bresee developed a relationship with the Johnny Carson Tonight Show. He would loan the Tonight Show staff filmed copies of previous Tonight Shows to be shown over the air. He also produced birthday specials for Johnny using archived material from Johnny's career. Frank was allowed to use interviews from Johnny from the Tonight Show as features for Frank's "Golden Days of Radio." NBC did not have access to its own archives for the Tonight Show

from 1962 to 1972 because they destroyed the masters by reusing the tapes. Frank, in thinking outside of the box, knew that TV and radio networks did not save much of their archives. So Frank arranged to have the Tonight Show's audios beginning in 1959 and into the 1970s professionally recorded... Frank's archives feature the Tonight Show broadcasts that only exist in the Frank Bresee archives. This piece of the archives is a major holding.

While living in Europe in a leased chateaux for six months out of every year for 20 straight years, Frank acquired audio material for "The Golden Days of Radio" series. Some of the unique gems that Frank acquired include the master discs of W. C. Fields' appearances on the 1938 radio season "Your Hit Parade," and Frank Sinatra's rehearsals and live broadcasts of the 1940s radio series "Your Hit Parade."

### The Size, Scope and Importance of the Bresee Collection

Before Frank died in 2018, he made it known that he wished his collection to be public so that everyone could have complete access to his collection. Walden Hughes was asked to direct this project. Frank's private collection of radio archive items was so large that it took 17 vehicles including moving vans to transport the collection from his Hudson home to archive storage. This 30 ft. x 10 ft. storage unit is equipped with climate control.

Maintenance of this collection will allow historians of popular culture the ability to access a large number of oral interviews from the "movers and shakers" of radio and entertainment dating from the 1930s through the 1950s. For example, the archives have in-depth interviews with such personalities as Ray Bradbury and Norman Corwin, two of the most esteemed writers in radio, as they discuss the influence of their writing in the 1940s in radio.

Hearing the personalities speaking in their own words allows historians to gain insights and preserve nuances that the written word cannot provide. The archives have oral interviews with such personalities as Mae West, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, George Burns, Rudy Vallee, Groucho Marx, Edgar Bergen, Jim Jordan and so many more.

Frank was able to reach top personalities of radio because of his background in Hollywood. There are other archives that feature radio personalities, but they do not date as far back or include as many "first tier" stars. Some of the other archives and interview programs that include radio personalities are hosted by Chuck Schaden, Dick Bertell, "Same Time Same Station" from KRLA, The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, The Friends of Old Time Radio, John Dunning, Ray Briem, Larry King, "Don't Touch That Dial," "The Society to Preserve Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy, Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound, John and Larry Gassman, Rich Lamparski, Yesterday USA, Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters, and Walden Hughes. Many of these archives are either in private hands or are not freely accessible to historians. The

goal of this project is to make far reaching and in-depth interviews that Bresee did from the years 1946-2009 to be easily and broadly accessible.

The archives have the in-depth documentaries on personalities, shows, and radio history that would give historians additional information for their personal research.

### The Importance of Cataloging and Finding Aids

Finding aids will be unique to this collection. The aids will be designed to include accessibility features for blind historians. Many of the current research tools do not take accessibility features into design consideration. The archives will be available online and can be freely copied. The aids will be designed to function with speech software available to blind users. The accessible format of the text layout will enable blind researchers to gather information. Also sighted scholars will have the ability to use the data for research.

There will be a special team working on this project. They include Martin Grams who has written over 40 TV and radio popular books; Dr. Joseph Webb, radio historian; Karl Schadow, an independent researcher affiliated with the Library of Congress; John and Larry Gassman, two blind radio historians; Michael Hingson, blind and best-selling NY Times author and 9/11 survivor; and Walden Hughes who is also blind and who will direct the project.

Dr. Michael Biel will be the project archivist. Dr. Biel is a world-renowned archivist who has travelled the world examining archives. He is a consultant with the Library of Congress. Dr. Biel was in charge of the radio archives at Northwestern University.

The website that will maintain Frank Bresee's archives will be designed by sighted historians for sighted and blind users. The finding aids will be accessible on the website as well as the audio files of the collection. The project director will ensure that UC Santa Barbara, REPS and SPERDVAC will be able to host the site on their servers. That way the long-term viability of the project will be assured.

From 1954 to 2010, Frank's archives have been housed in climate-controlled conditions at Frank Bresee's studio. Now, Walden Hughes is directing the archives to be stored in climate controlled conditions in Orange County, California.

The archives will be released to the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound (REPS) [www.repsonline.org](http://www.repsonline.org); and The Society to Preserve Radio, Drama, and Comedy (SPERDVAC) [www.sperdvac.com](http://www.sperdvac.com), both of which are long-standing 501 (c)(3) organizations whose mission and purpose are congruent with the project goals and the University of California Santa Barbara with their American Radio Broadcasts archives. The project will be able to be released to other interested archivers.

The Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound (REPS) is based in Seattle. Beginning in January 2025, REPS will receive operational capital to cover expenses for increased staffing, storage and facility rental. These funds will be given to REPS and other nonprofits through a new program, "Doors Open," by the city of Seattle. The agency is increasing their funds increase from 10 million to 100 million dollars a year to 800 nonprofit companies.

The Frank Bresee archives has a relationship with UC Santa Barbara. The university is the home of Frank's radio scripts, TV shows, films and some audio material. These items are currently in university storage and not being utilized. This part of the collection was housed at the Thousand Oaks Library and was transferred to Santa Barbara almost two years ago along with other radio archives. The archives are not yet open to the public.