

THE 1955 TROJAN Alumni PRINTS

February 2003 • Send news articles and/or photos to Frank Hunter, 106 Columbia Dr. #12B, Tampa, FL 33606 • Email fhunter@sptimes.com • Issue 15

Eaves-dropping at Classmates.com

When we were kids down on 4th street, the week after Christmas was when we started our "Christmas tree fort". We would collect all of the discarded Christmas trees and bring them to the 4th Street Park. We would then stack them in a "U" against the wall that elevated the street. We would then crawl inside the stacked trees and sort of camp out (they did block the wind). The Christmas tree fort only lasted until the garbage men collected the trees after the New Year. We did this every year for many years. I guess it made it easy for the city trash collection because all of the Christmas trees in the West End were in the 4th Street Park. The late 40s and mid 50s was a good time to grow up in Portsmouth. Although most people were blue collar workers, there was enough work to keep most families going. I know the West End had a lot going for it.

Remember the Toyland at Kobackers? May not seem like much now with all of the malls, but back in the 50s, Toyland at Kobackers is where we all wanted to go during the weeks before Christmas. Several of the other stores also started one up and there were several different Santas in town. Kobackers is where our mom got our toys each year (lay away).

Larry Schneller 1956

I remember Bragdon's toy department in the basement of their store. They had a large electric train set up back at one end. Bill Meade and I used to go there often at Christmas. My mother used to shop in Kobackers. Do you remember the xray machine they had in the Sears shoe department. You stuck your foot in a hole in the bottom and looked in the top to see an xray of your foot, bones and all. These things were eventually outlawed, but in our day no one realized how dangerous overexposure to xrays could be.

Do you remember the automatic donut making machine in the Kressge dime store. It was up front just inside the doors and was quite a wonder to watch. It consisted of a round vat of hot grease (cooking oil was not invented yet), a canister to hold and dispense batter, a merry-go-round like wheel with compartments around its rim, a spatula like arm to flip the donuts over, and another spatula to remove the finished donuts. The canister dispensed donut shaped globs of batter into the compartments of the wheel as it rotated slowly moving the donuts around the edge of the vat. Halfway around the the first spatula turned the donuts over to cook the other side, and before the donuts completed their full revolution the second spatula flipped them out of the vat into a drying bin. What a marvelous machine. Although I can't recall the exact price of these donuts, I'm sure it was 25 cents or less. I remember buying Crispy Creme donuts for 25 cents a dozen, and these were not nearly as good. Remember the large barrel at the dime

store that held the root beer? A large mug of cold root beer for 10 cents.

Don Wallace

The thing I remember most about Kressge is the pop corn. 10 cent bag and it was big.

Larry Schneller

Kobackers Christmas - HO HO HO! I used to go there when I was too old to believe anymore and take my brothers and sisters. I also remember writing letters to Santa to the radio station (I think) and Santa would read them. We listen every day so as not to miss ours.

Carolyn Duncan 1958

There is a very good video of the 1937 Flood I think it is named "Voices of the River". I bought my copy at Smith's drugstore. It was made at Shawnee college. (Coach Lorentz's son John was instrumental in the production) I lived on the hilltop and I wasn't in the flood but so many people were. I remember people living in the different schools. I was going to Highland school at the time. All the schools on the hilltop had people living in there. There was no place for them to go. So sad, I hope that never happens again. Also did you ever have Hazel Wyant in High School? She passed away this week.

Phyllis Orth Sparks 1947

The Lyric Theater used to have a movie program for kids that started on Saturday morning (don't remember how early, but around 10:30 AM, I think). They had a bunch of cartoons, the weekly serial (Rocketman, Batman, etc.) and several cowboy and other action movies. Several of us West Enders would all go together. I think the movies lasted until around 4:00 pm (cost was 16 cents for under 12, Columbia and LaRoy were 20 cents, Garden a dime). Sure were lots of kids there every Saturday. There were also a few midnight movies, but we didn't go to those very often.

Larry Schneller

I remember the Lyric Theater very well. I worked there as an usher while going to PHS in 1957-58. I later was a doorman at the LaRoy Theater from 1958-59. I saw a lot of great movies and had my share of good times with the girls in the LaRoy balcony!

Terry Smith 1959

A bright Spot

Portsmouth City Council, in their first meeting of the new year, on January 13, 2003, moved to adopt a resolution supporting the restoration and operation of the Columbia Theater as the Columbia Music Hall.

"Once fully restored," the resolution reads, "the Columbia Music Hall will be a new independent business, bringing additional employment to the City of Portsmouth and the surrounding areas," and, "not only will this help to revitalize the downtown Portsmouth area, but will also help to provide a much needed opportunity for cultural offerings to Southern Ohio."

Hamburger Wars

- Scioto County style.

In 1935 there were three hamburger restaurants calling themselves, Hamburger Inn, 739 Fifth Street. owned by Horace G. McCauley; Hamburger Inn No. 1 at 1547 Gallia Street, owned by Arthur J. Bodmer; Hamburger Inn No. 3, at 1539 Gallia Street, owned by Joe Hatcher (Neal's Dad).

In 1944 there were four restaurants calling themselves by that name: Hamburger Inn No. 1 was still owned and operated by Mr. Bodmer at 1547 Gallia, but Hamburger Inn No. 1 1/2 was by then located at 848 6th St., managed by Maude Thompson, and owned by Mr. Bodmer. Horace G. McCauley still had his 739 Fifth St., store, but another had popped up at 734 Fifth St., owned by Bernice V. Babcock. The 1539 Gallia St. restaurant had closed by '44.

By 1952, the Hamburger Inn list dwindled to one, and that is The Original Hamburger Inn, No. 1, owned by Vola Bodmer, at its present location.

In 1952 J. Everett Reese had his Reese hamburger Shop, at 5731 Gallia St., Sciotoville. Reese's store burned during the 1970s.

Now we have Hickey's Hamburger's in New Boston, and don't forget three Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers, and three Macdonald's Hamburger restaurants. So, the Hamburger wars are still on, only we've come to accept them all, with little in the way of battles. This is certainly a hamburger area.

Hot Dogs have always gone well here too. Remember Andy's Hot Dog Stand, and Nick's Hot Dogs in New Boston? How about Blackie's Restaurant located between Sciotoville and New Boston, on Rt. 52? All good. Do you remember Nick Kourkounis' Coney Island Restaurant, located at 1002 Gallia Street, across Bond Street, from what is now the 471 American Legion. I remember going into the Coney Island for two of his "Coney's" and a Pepsi in a tall glass 12-oz. Bottle, after leaving Portsmouth High School. Wonderful!

In 1952 Mrs. Lena Blackburn ran the Greenwich Inn, at 604 Harrisonville Ave., New Boston. Now the hot dog kings of the business are; Little Nick's Hot Dogs, 1722 Harrisonville Ave., New Boston, and the wonderful footers at the Darie Crème, 333 Second St., Portsmouth, owned by Robert S. Born, and Misty's Cone Shop, Center Street, Wheelersburg, operated by Marvin Hull. Great!

Pizza... too many to mention them all, but I still think Harold's Restaurant had the best in the world. Truly of gourmet quality. Nothing pedestrian about Harold's pizza, nor of Harold's food in general; all top quality. We miss that place!

New Address/Phone

Send all material to Frank Hunter, 106 Columbia Dr. #12B, Tampa, FL 33606 813-258-8976

Jack Burgess Writes

Thanks for all your work on the alumni paper. I like the way it's evolving into a "serious" paper with the fine columns by you – yes, it's terrible what they're doing to Union Terminal. I saw that happen in Columbus, too. Now they have murals of Union Station on the newer walls they built over the grave of the Station. Summer comes and we all want to go to Europe to see some old buildings. We never seem to learn, though, here in Chillicothe, as in Portsmouth we have preserved much of the old downtown.

I Went to My Uncle Ralph's Funeral by Jack Burgess

*Everyone was there, the usual children
and grandchildren,
A color guard—he was in the war—
His union brothers, fellow bricklayers,
And fifty years of golf partners.
Autographed golf balls lined the casket,
Golf clubs decorated each corner of the bronze box,
The preacher told about how Ralph made him laugh
When they played golf together,
But said that before he died
Ralph was washed in the blood of the lamb.*

*At Sunset Gardens they said more prayers,
The veterans fired a smoky salute,
Brass casings popped out on the ground,
And with the rifles' crack the widow sobbed out
Her painful goodbye.
The post commander banded her
The neatly folded flag,
No one laughed,
But tears washed away some of the pain.*

*Afterward, I drove through my uncle's hometown,
And mine, although the house where I was born,
So carefully built by my mother's father,
Has been torn down to make way for a parking lot
That no one uses.*

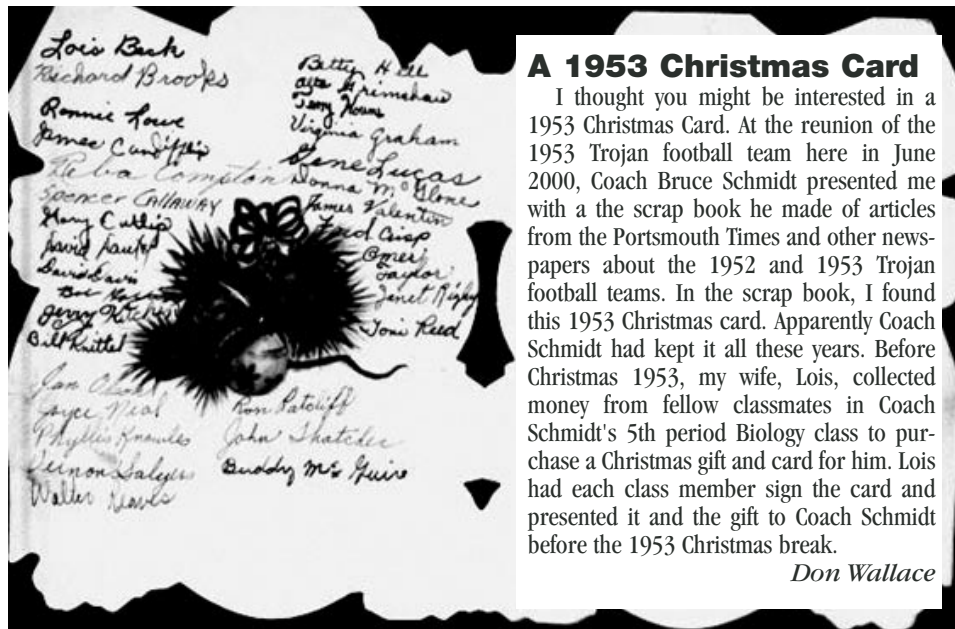
*And the mansion we moved into –
Actually we lived over the garage –
My dad was the caretaker,
Firing the furnace, making repairs,
Was torn down just lately.
Only a few pieces of the russet brick remain,
Strewn around the site.
The preacher said not to worry,
For in Heaven there are many mansions.*

*Then, up the fog shrouded river valley,
North toward home. It's a flat, lonely valley that
Was once home to now vanished tribes,
Who grew their corn, but left no epitaph,
Except for occasional spear points, cup pieces,
And strange geometrical mounds of earth.*

*Long before that, the ancient river thundered
A mile wide with run off from the towering ice
to the North.*

*On one side of the river a squad of giant mastodons
Looked on, trumpeting a salute to the roaring torrent,
Which washed all before it, between the
Hills that curved gently against the sky
Like rows of sleeping dinosaurs.*

February, 2002



A 1953 Christmas Card

I thought you might be interested in a 1953 Christmas Card. At the reunion of the 1953 Trojan football team here in June 2000, Coach Bruce Schmidt presented me with a the scrap book he made of articles from the Portsmouth Times and other newspapers about the 1952 and 1953 Trojan football teams. In the scrap book, I found this 1953 Christmas card. Apparently Coach Schmidt had kept it all these years. Before Christmas 1953, my wife, Lois, collected money from fellow classmates in Coach Schmidt's 5th period Biology class to purchase a Christmas gift and card for him. Lois had each class member sign the card and presented it and the gift to Coach Schmidt before the 1953 Christmas break.

Don Wallace

I Missed Elvis

Unfortunately, Elvis Presley had not made his main impact on American music before we graduated from Portsmouth High School in 1955. By that time the music teenagers listened to was just beginning to switch over from "standard pop" to "rock and roll." I must admit, in retrospect, that the mysterious new frenzied teenage music craze was somewhat slow to start in southern Ohio. Before the popularizing of rock and roll we lived a fairly simple musical existence.

There was "long hair" - that is, classical music for high brows; country and western (or "hillbilly" as we called it in Portsmouth); rhythm and blues (mainly only appreciated by the blacks in our community); and pop, "Your Hit Parade" ballads of the white middle class.

Can you remember the way we could express our deepest emotions to a loved one? "If I Knew You Were Coming I'd've Baked a Cake" (a 1951 hit for Eileen Barton) or "Come On-a My House" ("I'm gonna give you candy..."), a hit for Rosemary Clooney also in 1951. As a contrast to the triteness and artificiality of early fifties pop, there were the innumerable novelty hits. These were odd, unusual recording which rather frequently became best sellers. Think of Frankie Laine's 1950 hit "I Believe" or the Weavers' "On Top of Old Smoky" (1954). "Vaya Con Dios" (Les Paul and Mary Ford, 1953), "Oh! My Pa-Pa" (Eddie Fisher, 1954), "Wheel of Fortune" (Kay Starr, 1952), "Ebb Tide" (1953), "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window" (Patti Page, 1953) were just a few novelty tunes that broke the monotony for us.

Things started to change in 1952. A skinny, half-deaf kid named Johnny Ray broke into the pop charts with a double-sided hit, "The Little White Cloud That Cried" backed with just plain "Cry." Ray's music was no different from the usual "Your Hit Parade" stuff, but his performance was. He flaunted his neuroses and would ritually end every stage show collapsed and sobbing. He would tremble, twist, choke in agony, squirm, buckle, and, most of all, weep - aggressively and exhibitionistically. This won him lots of passion-

ate fans--mostly teenagers. Ray was a portent of the future and a cultural transition point. He sang pop music, but he introduced us teenagers to the idea that music could involve raw emotions.

At about this same time, Alan Freed, a disc jockey in Cleveland, began playing rhythm and blues records performed by black artists for his white teenage audience. Freed renamed R & B to "rock and roll" and put the music in a more familiar and acceptable format for white teenagers. Between 1952 and 1954, the broadening taste that Freed had recognized began to affect the national music market. To most white adults, however, this "new" music was mysterious and somehow unpleasant. It was crude compared to the conventionalities of ballads. Only rarely did adults buy these records. It was growing clearer that, whatever else it might be, this music was for adolescents.

One of the most interesting things about these new rock and roll hits was that the originals were performed by black artists, but the best-sellers were recorded ("covered") by white artists. This phenomenon existed until after I graduated from high school in 1955. As long as the pop record industry existed, artists have recorded one another's songs. But what happened in the early fifties was a departure from this tradition. A number of white artists founded their success on recording cover versions. Pat Boone was, perhaps, the best example. The list of Boone's covers include many of the greats of fifties rock and roll: "Ain't That a Shame" (Fats Domino), "Tutti Frutti" (Little Richard), and "I'll Be Home" (the Flamingos).

Popular music was hovering on this transitory brink just as we graduated. Elvis was signed by RCA records in June of 1955. Late in 1955 he recorded "Heartbreak Hotel." Within weeks it took the top position on both the pop and country charts and was in the top five on the R & B chart. Elvis quickly came to represent an utterly new and different sensibility to the music business and, indeed, to America at large.

So, although I enjoyed Elvis in my college years and long afterwards, I missed out on him during those formative years at Portsmouth High School.

Blaine Bierley



The Fonz?

I must tell you that Dean Knittle, class of '54, Eloise Knittle ('55) and Eloise's brother Tom Vaughters, class of '53, know nothing of this message, other than I did ask Dean if he minded if I sent a pix to you. I did not however, say why.

My wife Jane (Dever) and Eloise were best friends in high school years, and I used to hang out at the station (Vaughters Shell) at 11th and

Offnere streets. As you recall, I had a car and Dean helped me and many other guys hop up our cars (keep them running). The station was a great hangout too. I used to live two doors from it for one year.

I never knew Dean to have an enemy. Everyone liked him, and he just seemed to me and others to be the "FONZ" type of guy.

Fred Ramsey

Roger Howard

Hi everybody, I doubt if many of you remember a shy Roger Howard who was not active in sports, any special activities & did not attend any of the dances. I think I did attend every basketball & football game-even away games on a bus or train. The only extra-curricular activity I was on was alternate on the French scholarship team. My main interest outside of school was Indian lore. I was in a scout troop where my patrol learned authentic indian dances, dance steps, drum beats & rituals. We made costumes & performed for many organizations. Bob Young & Bob Mohl were also in that group along with people from other classes such as Dave Schisler, Bob Collins & Leo Dent.

I now live in Columbus but have a Groveport mailing address. My wife Marcia is in a nursing home. Of our 7 kids & 5 grand children, 4 daughters & 2 grand daughters live in or near Columbus. My oldest son is a Chief Master Sgt. stationed in Hawaii. I have a daughter in Gulf Shores Alabama & a son at Virginia Beach.

I keep myself busy by doing the church newsletter - both an email & a printed edition, and teach an on-line Bible study. Presently I am teaching all four Gospels together by using a Harmony of the Gospels. The Harmony puts the material in each Gospel in chronological order, then places the parts that tell the same story side by side. You would be surprised how much of the Gospel story is only told in only one of the Gospels. Only Luke tells about Jesus' Birth & only Matthew tells about the wise men & there is a lot more like that. The author used bold type to create a story line skipping back & forth to get the Gospel story with the most information. I then,

comment on the text given. I like to create my own greeting cards, business cards, gift tags etc. I have done a history of my church with pictures of all the pastors, I recently put my Bible Trivia into the computer to get ready to publish. I have written commentaries on the entire New Testament and have written commentaries on Genesis, Johah, Micah, Song of Solomon, Daniel, Zechariah, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I Kings & Malachi and booklets on speaking in tongues, judging, womens' place in the church, communion, Hebrew poetry, & articles on The Lord's prayer, Melchizedek, after death experiences & many other subjects. I guess you could say that I am a Bible nut.

I took my Christmas tree over to the nursing home for my wife & decided to do something that I have wanted to do for years - create a Christmas village. I guess I went overboard. I have 6 lighted building units which make ten businesses or homes; a large hill, 47 people plus 8 animals, a coffee cart, a mirror lake & a lighted garbage can with people warming around the fire. There are people skiing on the lake & a couple of kids sliding down a hill on a sled. There are 14 trees. The scene covers an oblong gate leg table plus a TV tray. It's about 5 feet by three feet with the tallest structure being 7 1/2 inches .

I moved from the 5 bedroom house where we raised the kids to a condo with a lake within a stone's throw of my front porch. I have a Blue Heron that feeds in front of my home every day. Mallard ducks are common & some folks have seen deer.

I was really excited about the web site with the photos of the flood wall murals. I have always wanted to share them with my friends.

Roger Howard

Sam Skaggs

Sam lived on Linden Avenue with his grandparents, and I never heard him speak much of his natural parents. Sam and I worked together at the Security Central National Bank after high school. We obtained those jobs through the efforts of Miss Wittenburg (co-op class).

At one time Sam and Bob Neal had a band know as "The Bobby Clinton Sextet". The name came from Bob Neal's first name and Sam's middle name which was Clinton. The members of the group were Ralph Riggs, Joe Berthe, Tom Phillips and I believe a somewhat older African American on piano who was not a classmate, but a little older and a member of the local musician's union. Those of us who heard them realized that they were very good, and they were able to get quite a few "gigs" I believe.

One of my cherished memories of Sam is the many times that we cruised around in his grandfather's blue '48 Plymouth along with Tom Phillips, Ralph Riggs, and Joe Berthe harmonizing to "Earth Angel" and many of the Four Freshmen hits. He was a great fan of the Four Freshmen and had met them several times. As I recall, on some of those evenings there may have even been an adult beverage or two consumed as we sang our way around town. I was honored to help carry Sam to his final resting place in Wheelersburg. He is playing that alto sax with the "Big Band" now and I will always remember him fondly.

Harry Clyburn '57

Rocky Nelson

As a 17-year old rookie with Johnson City in the Appalachian League in 1942, Rocky played fifty-three games as a first baseman-pitcher and failed to hit a home run while batting .253. He then spent three years in military service, returning in 1946 to the Cardinals' farm system. After leading the Piedmont League with a .371 batting average in 1947, he spent 1948 with Rochester, batting .303 against International League pitchers.

During the 1950's, Rocky Nelson was a slugger of the first rank and a mystery to those who saw one major league team after another invite him to spring training. The Cardinals, Pirates, White Sox, Dodgers, Indians, Dodgers again, and Cardinals all gave Rocky his walking papers.

In 1959, he was drafted by the Pirates, and finally fortune smiled on him at the major league level. He hit his only World Series home run during the Pirates memorable seventh game defeat of the Yankees in 1960.

When he retired to his native Portsmouth, Ohio, his major league career showed an unspectacular .246 batting average with 31 homers over 620 games. But what he did during his days in the minors, a .319 batting average, 234 home runs, three MVP's, three batting championships, all while averaging just under 35 strikeouts per season make him a legend of the International League and all minor league baseball.

Known for his oversized tobacco chaw, continuous chatter, and an odd, open batting stance, with both feet pointed at the pitcher. He was inducted into the International League, the Ohio Baseball, and the Canadian Baseball halls of fame.

Joe Kegley Congrats

JOE KEGLEY, retired American government teacher at PHS, who now lives at the Hill View Retirement Center on 28th Street in Portsmouth, celebrated his 100th birthday on November 8, 2002. We wish him health and happiness.

Kitty Clark Writes

I am very saddened at the news that the city of Portsmouth is tearing down the N&W railroad depot to make way for a new JAIL. Not only is it a beautiful art deco building, but it is also a historical landmark for the Norfolk and Western Railway. My dad and several of my uncles were all engineers on the N&W from the days of the steam engines to the diesels. The pride they felt for the stately old depot was enormous. It should definitely be preserved and made into a new museum or office building. There are so many empty lots in Portsmouth now it should be easy to find a different less conspicuous location for a jail. Just building the jail along a major highway through the city is a mistake, let alone tearing down a major landmark to do it. The people of Portsmouth should take a stand on this one. Don't let them destroy something that can never be replaced and as historically significant as the old depot.

Kitty (Clark) Born, Class of 1957

Seeking Lost Friends

Hi Frank!

I received your address from Betty Hill, Brig. Hill's daughter. I am interested in getting the newsletter from PHS contributors from your class. My maiden name is Sue Carter from Wayne Hills. I have older sisters you probably remember, Frieda and Barbara Carter. My address is Sue Spence, 54 Orchard St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45217.

Do you ever hear from anyone from Garfield School or Wayne Hills friends? I have lost contact with everyone, but would love to hear from some of my childhood friends.

Sue Carter Spence

Hazel Wyant

HAZEL B. WYANT, 94, died December 12, 2002, at Southern Ohio Medical Center in Portsmouth. She lived at the Hill View Retirement Center on 28th Street. She was a 1926 graduate of PHS and a 1930 graduate of OSU. She was a retired teacher in the Portsmouth City Schools with 40 years of service, retiring in 1970. She taught Business Education at PHS, shorthand and Office Practice. I know she was loved by many of us and we certainly owe her a big thank-you.

Sent anything for Web Site?

We have a fabulous web site, thanks to Tom DuPuy. However if it is to grow, everyone needs to contribute something so that we can share in what you are doing. It is really easy as Tom does all the work. Check it out: www.phs1955.com

Send photos or copy to Tom Dupuy: 1311 Hilllake Lane, Lebanon, Tn 37090 or email material to: tj@charter.net

The Comics

Considering the recent death of cartoonist Charles Schulz, who gave us fifty years of pleasure with his comic strip "Peanuts," I was thinking and trying to remember the comics that I read and enjoyed in The Portsmouth Times when I was growing up in the 1940s.

The earliest comic strip that I can remember was the "Katzenjammer Kids" being read to me by my Grandpa Bierley, using a rich German accent to describe how Hans und Fritz would put one over on the Captain. Another of Grandpa's favorites was "Bud" Fisher's "Muff and Jeff." Mutt was the tall guy and Jeff was the shorty with the top hat and whiskers.

I can remember reading "Gasoline Alley" and "Little Orphan Annie" during World War II. I think Skeeze went off to fight in the war leaving Uncle Walt Wallet behind to be an air raid warden. Harold Gray had Annie and Sandy fighting the Nazis. I can vividly remember the story line where Annie trapped some German soldiers in an underground tunnel and forced them to send up their guns on a rope in exchange for food. I suppose that Punjab and Daddy Warbucks came to the rescue later on. Joe Palooka joined the army also and Knobby Walsh, his manager, had to put boxing on hold while Joe was off to fight the foes of democracy. I can't remember if Joe fought in Europe or in the Pacific. Of course, Milton Caniff's (from Hillsboro, Ohio, and an OSU graduate) "Terry and the Pirates" was a favorite during this time too. Terry gave the Nips all the blood and thunder they deserved.

After the war was over, I remember following Dagwood Bumstead and watching his family grow up in "Blondie." Another funny family that I followed was Maggie and Jiggs in "Bringing Up Father." Jiggs was the proverbial Irish-American with his love of corned beef and spirits. His wife, Maggie, was always trying to get him to attend some high brow social affair.

It seemed that the whole country followed the antics of "Li'l Abner." Abner Yokum was very naive, but he was constantly able to expose the many city slickers who came to Dogpatch. Do you remember "Kickapoo Joy Juice"?

I don't remember reading Walt Kelly's "Pogo" until the 1950s. Pogo, the possum, and Albert, the alligator, humanized animals and showed up the idiosyncrasies of their human counterparts.

As I reflect back on all these comic strips, I believe, that with the exception of "Blondie," none of the others that I followed with great interest and boyhood glee still exist. Isn't it a shame.

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Science Fiction Movies

Do you remember those fantastic and funny SciFi films that we saw at the LaRoy and the Columbia Theaters in the early 1950s? The very first one that I remember seeing was Destination Moon in 1950. It was a pseudo-documentary about a trip (obviously) to the moon. Many of the early SciFi films reflected the varying degrees of our anxiety about the future of atomic energy.

Was atomic energy going to be the key to the ease and security of the future or was it going to kill us all? Portsmouth would get a more direct exposure to the world of atomic energy when the Gaseous Diffusion Plant was built in Piketon a few years later.

An early example that I remember was Rocketship X-M, released in 1950 to compete with Destination Moon. An expedition set out to the moon but was thrown off course and landed on Mars. The Earth explorers learned that atomic warfare had destroyed Martian civilization. Another example was Five (1951), which told the story of the Earth's last survivors who, interestingly, seemed more concerned with the fact that one of their number was black than with the atomic holocaust.

Most of the science-fiction disaster films, however, dealt with alien monsters who threatened American civilization. Many such monsters were brought forth by atomic explosions: either mutants created by radiation or prehistoric monsters revived by nuclear blasts. The Beast, The Blob, The Creature from the Black Lagoon, The Deadly Mantis, and The Crab Monsters were just a few of the deadly atomic offspring stalking or slithering through post-Hiroshima cinema.

Other films dealt with menacing monsters of extra-terrestrial origin. A great 1951 film of this type, The Thing From Another World, combined nearly all major American paranoias: fear of an alien force, flying saucers, world destruction, extra-terrestrial invasion, and atomic radiation. The "Thing" crashes in a flying saucer and is quick-frozen into Arctic ice. The creature is discovered by an American military expedition, and when the "Thing" thaws it proves to be both alive and dangerous. Although it has a human shape (portrayed by James Arness), the "Thing" turns out to be a radioactive vegetable that feeds on blood. After several disasters the military succeeds in destroying the monster. But, the movie ends with a direct exploitation of national anxieties: A reporter faces the audience and warns "watch the skies...keep looking...watch the skies!"

Probably the best movie in this genre (in my opinion) was another 1951 release, The Day the Earth Stood Still. Like The Thing, it dealt with an alien being brought to Earth by a flying saucer. The stranger, Klaatu (Michael Rennie), is a friendly alien, a representative of advanced civilizations come to bring to the destructive people of Earth a solemn warning: "Don't play with the atomic bomb. Grow up and stop playing with fire." To draw attention to his message, the stranger neutralized the Earth's electrical and mechanical power for half an hour. The attempt is futile, Americans panic and the army is sent to destroy Klaatu. He is killed but revived by his robot, Gort, and together they leave the Earth. Unlike The Thing, The Day the Earth Stood Still offered no simple triumph of good over evil. It did, I believe, force the viewers to question some of their most fundamental assumptions.

Maybe we were too young to really appreciate the more subtle implications of these movies back in the early '50s. Anyway, they certainly were fun to watch then and to remember now.

Blaine Bierley