



As I was saying...

Robert Benchley's many interesting faces

By JACK HILSHER

If I were to mention the name Robert Benchley, would any of you remember him? Those who do, read on. Those who don't, read on anyway. You will both be rewarded.

Benchley, not really very memorable, fits no particular category. He once wrote humor for the NEW YORKER, was a movie critic, movie actor, but never a leading man. He had a small mustache but a face very like your next door neighbor. In fact it was this kind of role that Benchley played in movie short subjects in the 30s and 40s.

He was the bumbling neighbor who always borrowed your lawn mower and then wanted you to help him start it. Or broke it. Or both. Doesn't sound like much, but his skits were masterpieces.

Other shorts featured lectures on things like "Sex Life of a Polyp" or "Your Income Tax" with Benchley droning on with utter nonsense but with great sincerity. Audiences missed a lot of dia-

logue because they were laughing so hard. I know. I was there.

A friend said that, "while he was a humorist, those of us who knew Robert Benchley well sometimes found it hard to remember anything funny that he said. It was the outlook that mattered."

That was true - there were more things he did that were hilarious than things he said. For example, Benchley had problems with doctors. He never trusted them. When he came down with pneumonia, a doctor had him take one of the new sulfa drugs. Before the doctor was to call again, Benchley, with actor Charlie Butterworth's help, broke open a pillow and, with paste, glued feathers all over himself from the waist down. He then covered the feathered area with a sheet.

The doctor arrived, examined Benchley's chest, asked him how he was feeling and if the pills had done any good. Benchley said he thought so, but added, "I don't know what to make of this, though," as he threw back the sheet and uncovered the feath-

ers. "Is this OK?"

There was another side to Benchley, as there usually is with funny guys, and this is the real reason for this column. Good friend Quentin Reynolds recalls Benchley taking him in a cab to Grant's tomb. In the silent dawn they climbed a fence and went through the shrubs to a grave-stone. Benchley found it immediately, and as Reynolds learned later, came there often.

The stone read:

Erected to the Memory of an Amiable Child St. Claire Pollock Died 15 July 1797

In the Fifth Year of his Age

Reynolds remembers, "We didn't say much on the trip back, but I could sense beneath Benchley's satisfaction at introducing me to something rare, a warm paternal feeling for the amiable child, dead so long, but still remembered. It pleases me to recall Benchley thus, touched by his own feeling for someone gone."

I said you'd be rewarded if you read on.

Library news

Library displays exquisite antique china

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The display case at the Back Mountain Memorial Library is showing a collection of antique china to announce the 42nd annual Prince of Peace Episcopal Church Antique Show and Sale to be held Tuesday, May 3 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Wednesday, May 4 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the church parish house on Main Street in Dallas. The show is sponsored by the Women of Prince of Peace.

Featured in the display is an Austrian antique tea set with large cake plate and serving dishes. A sterling silver cake server is included. There is a German Chocolate pot with sugar and creamer; a sterling silver nut dish and mint dish; sterling silver bottle opener; pickle fork; cheese knives and condiment spoons. Also featured

is a Czechoslovakian pink cameo china tea pot, with sugar and creamer; and dessert plates, cups and saucers. All of the china is from the 1930's. The display presents a welcome sign to the spring season and will be at the library until May 11.

New books at the library: "Dangerous To Know" by Margaret Yorke shows the authors chilling ability to remove the mask of respectability to show us the brutal face beneath which rears itself with delicious wickedness. She pulls aside the lace curtains of middle-class living to reveal a dark portrait of a marriage. For twenty years, Hermione had lived in fear of her husband's rages and was taking a small step towards a different life.

"Grand Days" by Frank Moorhouse tells of the moral and sexual awakening of an idealistic

Australian woman working in the diplomatic corps in Europe in the aftermath of World War I. On a train from Paris to Geneva, Edith meets Major Westwood in the dining car, and allows him to kiss her passionately. Their early intimacy binds them together once they reach Geneva and their post at the League of Nations. A vivid, funny and wise story.

"The Troublesome Offspring of Cardianl Guzman" by Louis de Bernieres is a breathtakingly audacious story, where farce and tragedy cheerfully intertwine. Despite the Cardinal's efforts, life flourishes in Cochabaja, with its improbable population of ex-soldiers, former guerrillas, unfrocked priests and prostitutes who celebrate the spirits of the land. A bogus priest takes a decisive hand in setting the record straight.

FLEA MARKET

Penn State Wilkes-Barre Athletics & Recreation Program is holding a Spring Flea Market on Saturday, April 30, and Sunday, May 1, 1994, from 9:00 AM to 3 PM. The fee for space is \$10.00 for one day or \$15.00 for both days. The Flea Market will be held inside, please bring your own table. For more information, or to reserve space call, 675-9181 or 675-9259. Public is invited!

A fine bucket of fish

Jack Stash volunteered last Saturday to help the Fish Commission stock a section of Harveys Creek near Meeker with an assortment of brook, rainbow and brown trout, with a few trophy-size palominos for good measure.

POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

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BOAT TIP #2 by Dave

Q. How do I choose a canoe suited for my needs?

A. First determine how and where you will use your canoe - Recreation, Tripping, Cruising, Whitewater Sport, Competition. Then visit and talk with the experts.

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