

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 308

“And Now, a Word from Our Sponsor”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“Pepsodent Tooth Paste contains a new and different cleansing and polishing material. We want to emphasize the fact that this cleansing and polishing material used in Pepsodent Tooth Paste is contained in no other tooth paste. That is very important. It is important to us, because Pepsodent laboratories spent eleven years in developing this remarkable material. It is important to the public, because no other cleansing and polishing material removes film from teeth as effectively as this new discovery. What’s more, this new material is twice as soft as that commonly used in tooth pastes. Therefore, it gives greater safety, greater protection to lovely teeth. Use Pepsodent tooth paste twice a day—See your dentist at least twice a year.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Episode 308. And Now, a Word from Our Sponsor.

In the old days, selling was done face to face. A potential customer came to you in the marketplace or into your shop, or maybe you were a peddler and you went to them. However you met, your sale was conducted face to face. You had a couple of minutes to persuade your potential customer that the item you were selling was something they needed and was worth the money you were asking for it. They either agreed and bought it, or disagreed and walked away. Or shut the door.

Advertising has always existed. One American advertising executive liked to point to pre-historic cave paintings as evidence of the antiquity of his trade. That’s a stretch, but it is true that for as long as there has been civilization, there have been posters, signs, and painted messages calling attention to merchants and products for sale, as well as town criers and traveling peddlers who called out their sales messages as they passed through city streets.

Printed weekly newspapers first began to appear during the Renaissance and daily newspapers in the 18th century. From the very beginning, newspapers sold advertising space in their pages. At first, advertising was just a little extra income on the side. But—and stop me if you’ve heard this story before; no, on second thought don’t, because I *know* you’ve heard it before—the 19th

century brought new technologies that lowered the costs of printing and distributing a newspaper, along with increased literacy and a growing middle class who had enough disposable income to buy a paper and enough education to read it. Newspapers multiplied and became a big business, and newspaper advertising exploded along with it. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the price a consumer paid for a newspaper barely covered the cost of printing and distributing it. The costs of hiring the reporters, artists, and writers who contributed to the paper were covered by advertising revenue.

Newspapers aside, these new, improved, and less costly printing processes also led to new forms of advertising, such as leaflets and handbills, and that 19th-century favorite, the trade card. These were something like postcards, typically with a nice picture of the product on one side and information on where and how to buy it on the other. Trade cards *per se* don't exist anymore; they've evolved into business cards.

Improved and less costly printing processes also led to the birth of the newspaper's first cousin, the magazine. In the early twentieth century United States, the first and biggest mass circulation magazine was *The Saturday Evening Post*, which pioneered the form, including being the first to put illustrations on the cover. Later came *Cosmopolitan*, *McClure's*, *The New Republic*, just to name a few we've already looked at on the podcast. The Jazz Age saw the introduction of *Time*, the first news magazine, whose editors consciously adopted a punchy, casual, irreverent prose style. A decade later came *Newsweek*, founded by a former editor at *Time*. *Business Week* began in 1929, just in time to cover the stock market crash. *Time* magazine publisher Henry Luce created *Life* magazine in 1936, which went from a circulation of zero to one million in its first month and introduced the world to the concept of photojournalism.

The proliferation of magazines led to journals devoted to all sorts of special interests and aimed at defined audiences, including magazines intended primarily for women, or for children and adolescents, or magazines for people interested in automobiles or music or science, or magazines that published fiction of varying types. This proliferation of special interest magazines created challenges for businesses interested in buying advertising. Advertising in a local newspaper is a relatively simple process. The business buying the advertisement is presumably located within the newspaper's area of circulation, and its owners have a pretty good idea how popular the paper is, who reads it, and so on. In other words, when they buy an ad in the local newspaper, they have a clear idea of what they're getting for their money.

Magazines have a much wider circulation area, especially in a country as big as the United States. It won't be a local business buying the ad; it will be someone selling a product to the whole nation. Imagine you work in the marketing department at, say, Ford Motor Company in 1925. You wouldn't have the same understanding of either the publications or their readerships that a local business would have of its local newspaper. Will Ford ads sell more cars in smaller specialty magazines aimed at men, like *Field and Stream* or *Argosy*? Or in wide-circulation general-interest magazines like *Time* or *The Saturday Evening Post*? What about *McClure's* or

The Atlantic Monthly or *The New Yorker*? Each of these magazines has its own readership, its own circulation figures, and its own advertising rates. How can Ford gauge which readership is most likely to buy cars, or how to weigh the likely number of cars a particular ad will sell versus the cost of placing it in a particular magazine? For that matter, how can Ford even be confident the circulation rates the magazines claim are accurate?

A very large company like Ford might have an in-house marketing department filled with people whose job is to figure all this stuff out. But what if your company is smaller, like say, Maxwell House Coffee? Maxwell House will never sell enough coffee to pay the salaries of that kind of marketing operation. So what do they do?

Enter the advertising agency. The first advertising agencies emerged in the mid-19th century, and initially all they did was buy advertising space in bulk from newspapers and magazines and then break it up and resell it at a markup to individual advertisers. In that sense, they were more like advertising brokers, independent sales agents selling advertising space on behalf of the publications.

But by the beginning of the twentieth century, advertising agencies were becoming something much more. They now had copywriters, and when they sold advertising space to businesses, the price included agency employees who would produce the advertising copy, including writing the text, choosing the fonts in which to print the text and the illustrations that would accompany it, and developing an eye-catching layout.

These modern ad agencies were still called agencies, but they weren't really in the business of selling ad space on behalf of a publication anymore. They still got paid a commission, but the commission came from the advertising business. The business paid the agency, and the agency paid the publication, after skimming off their commission, so they were now agents for the advertising business rather than the publication. In fact, it became standard practice in the industry that the advertiser and the publication never dealt with each other directly. Each dealt exclusively with the agency, which mediated between them.

Longtime listeners will recall back in the early years of twentieth-century America, episode 42, there was a scandal over shady advertising and sales techniques, especially involving patent medicines. Consumer groups, mostly organized by women, pressured Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act, which it did in 1906. This scandal damaged the reputation of patent medicines; to this day, the term "patent medicine" is used as a synonym for fraud.

The scandal also damaged the reputation of the business of advertising.

You already know that the United States experienced an economic boom from roughly 1924-1929 that saw rapid economic growth, increases in income, and an increased standard of living. It also saw a big increase in advertising to sell all the new consumer goods of the Jazz Age. This was great news for newspapers and magazines, which thrived during this period.

As a side note, newspapers are almost always general interest publications, and their ad rates are mostly a function of their circulation. As ad buys increased, newspapers had an incentive to maximize their circulation. That meant the older model of newspaper, one that had a particular political viewpoint, gave way to a newer model of news reporting that strove for even-handed objectivity. I'm told this was especially true in Canada, where papers that had a strong Liberal or Conservative slant would move to a more objective and neutral style, because, hey, Liberals buy toothpaste, too.

This also happened in the United States, as newspapers increasingly strove for a neutral tone, with objective reporting. Partisan politics were restricted to the editorial pages, and even there, many papers preferred taking high-minded editorial stances in favor of good government without advocating rule by any particular political party. This ideal of remaining politically neutral—or at least high-minded—would dominate American and Canadian newspapers for the rest of the century.

The magazine business was another story. Some magazines were general interest, others were not. Many were devoted to a particular interest or hobby or aimed at certain demographics, like women's magazines, which posed a challenge for advertisers, as I've already described, while the advertising industry, still smarting from the damage the patent medicine scandals did to its reputation, fought to reclaim respectability. They did this by adopting the view that advertising wasn't just a fancy word for lying; it was a profession, one that used modern, scientific tools to determine the optimal way to spend advertising dollars so as to maximize sales. For instance, consider a book called *Scientific Advertising*, by Claude Hopkins, published in 1923, which became the Bible of modern advertising, and is still highly regarded today.

But the Roaring Twenties also marked the rise of radio. You'll recall that in the US, the new medium's attitude toward advertising went from hostile to cautious acceptance to wholehearted embrace in about ten years. This was very different from most other countries, like Britain, where radio programming was funded by license fees.

At first, the advertising agencies were reluctant to get involved with radio. They had a good thing going with the newspapers and magazines, and worried that radio would hurt their much-more-valuable print advertising business.

It was not the ad agencies but their clients, the businesses themselves, that jumped on the radio bandwagon. As we saw, initially all a company got from sponsoring a radio program was its name in the title of the program, for instance *The Eveready Hour*, sponsored by Eveready batteries.

The agencies were skeptical about this sort of thing. Business leaders loved the idea of getting the name of their business spoken over the radio. Radio programs were seen as analogous to the theatre or a concert hall, a serious cultural experience, and having the name of your business attached to it lent prestige. Hence, Firestone, a tire company, sponsored *The Voice of Firestone*, a

program of opera selections. *The Bell Telephone Hour* played symphonic music, and the radio network NBC would eventually top everyone by assembling its own NBC Symphony Orchestra, directed by the renowned Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini, generally regarded as the greatest symphonic conductor of his time.

All very prestigious, to be sure, but skeptics at the advertising agencies asked, does any of this actually help sell batteries or tires? Audited circulation figures for magazines were an industry standard now, but how many people were listening to these radio programs? There was no sure way to measure that. And there were legitimate questions about whether advertising on the radio was equally effective. Advertising copy was a physical thing you were actually delivering into people's hands as part of their newspaper or magazine, but radio was just words. They were spoken once and disappeared into the air. Was anyone listening? Would anyone remember?

[audio clip: Bromo-Selzer commercial.]

I discussed the success of the radio program *Amos 'n' Andy* back in episode 238, and I told you that it began as a syndicated program out of a radio station in Chicago. It was advertising executive Albert Lasker of the Chicago agency Lord and Thomas, one of the biggest names in the field, who came up with the plan to bring the show to network radio, sponsored by one of his clients, Pepsodent toothpaste. The show was hugely popular and after the move, sales of Pepsodent toothpaste increased dramatically. That was the first solid evidence that advertising on radio paid off.

By the way, Albert Lasker was also a proponent of what was called “reasons-why” advertising, sometimes called “hard sell,” the basic principle being that you sell a product by giving the customer reasons why the product is good and buying it will improve their lives. The Pepsodent commercial I read to you at the top of the episode is a Lasker-era ad from *Amos 'n' Andy*. Note that the ad claims the toothpaste is gentler on your teeth and more effective, but doesn't actually base that claim on a rational argument supported by evidence. It just tells you they spent eleven years developing it and are very proud of it; neither of those things necessarily means the toothpaste is good, but those claims sure inspire confidence, don't they? Here is the essence of the Lasker approach.

The success of *Amos 'n' Andy* inspired copycat programs, beginning a longstanding tradition of new radio, and later television, programs simply copying the format of an existing popular show. The most successful of these copycat programs was *The Goldbergs*, which ran on radio and television until 1956. The show centered on the home of a poor Jewish immigrant family living in the Bronx. Like *Amos 'n' Andy*, the show ran daily for fifteen minutes at a time, with an ongoing storyline, and traded in ethnic stereotypes, although it sometimes took on serious issues relating to balancing old religious and ethnic values versus adapting to life in America.

In 1929, newspapers and magazines were still drawing far more advertising dollars than was radio. Then came the Great Depression. Advertisers cut back on spending, but much more on

print advertising than on radio advertising. This was a blow to print publications and the Depression itself was an embarrassment to the advertising industry. During the Roaring Twenties, ad agencies took credit for the boom, claiming it was their advertising that spurred the American economy forward. But when the bust came, the agencies proved unable to advertise America's way back to prosperity.

Radio, on the other hand, only grew in popularity throughout the Thirties. Radio receivers were becoming cheaper all the time, and even in an era in which every penny counts, it was more economical to entertain the family by putting a radio in the living room than it was to go out to concerts, shows, and other amusements. When the US economy began to recover in 1933, advertising receipts bounced back much faster for radio, and radio was soon claiming the lion's share for itself.

From the beginning, radio stations broadcast news. You'll recall how KDKA in Pittsburgh broadcast the 1920 Presidential election results and was hailed for demonstrating the potential of the new medium to rapidly deliver news and information to the public. Some of that hailing was done by newspapers. You'll recall too, that some of the first radio stations in the US were set up by newspapers, who saw radio as an adjunct to their core business.

By 1933 though, with advertising revenues shrunken, newspapers began to perceive radio as a competitor. Print journalism was heavily subsidized by advertising, but it still expected its customers to pay at least a few pennies. Radio, on the other hand, was just giving it away for free. Print journalists often suspected that radio news bulletins were simply rewrites of news stories the radio station had gotten from their newspaper, and sometimes these suspicions proved correct.

Newspapers fought back with lobbying and legal actions against radio stations. In 1933, they persuaded the syndicated wire services—Associated Press, United Press, and the International News Service—to stop providing news reports to radio stations. By the end of that year, the press and the networks negotiated an agreement to end the embargo: radio stations would only broadcast two five-minute news programs per day; the first not to begin before 9:30 AM, the second not to begin before 9:00 PM, after the morning and evening newspapers finished distribution. There would be no news programs at other times, not even for a breaking news story. And radio stations would not advertise during their news programs; that would be competition.

Well, that agreement didn't last very long. First CBS, then NBC, began their own in-house news divisions. Radio reporters quickly discovered that public officials, celebrities, and other newsmakers preferred talking to radio reporters rather than print reporters, because there was a cachet to getting your name spoken and your words quoted on the radio.

There were several milestones in the growth of radio journalism in the US: Presidential election and nominating convention coverage and the triumphant return of Charles Lindbergh to the US

following his solo transatlantic flight, just to name two. But the *Hindenburg* disaster really put radio journalism on the map, (and I suppose now is as good a time as any to tell that story, but first, this important message:

[audio clip: Signal Oil commercial.]

In 1903, an oil well in Kansas struck gas. That was not unusual. Oil deposits often also include natural gas, but this time, the gas that came out of the well didn't burn. Study of the gas showed it was mostly nitrogen, with some natural gas and a few other things, and also 2% helium.

Helium is the second most abundant element in the universe, but it is rare on planet Earth. It was soon learned that there were large reserves of helium under the Great Plains, making the United States the world's first, and for decades the world's only, source of helium.

The US government worked on extracting helium for use in dirigibles during the Great War, but the war ended before any military application could be developed. In 1925, Congress passed the Helium Act, which barred export of this valuable commodity.

Helium is valuable, you see, because it doesn't burn and you can use it in balloons. Or dirigibles. With the US retaining its monopoly on helium, other countries, especially Germany, were disadvantaged. In Germany, the Zeppelin company was working to improve their aircraft, aiming to design lighter-than-air airships that could be competitive with ships and airplanes for overseas travel.

In the US, the Navy led the way in experimenting with dirigibles for military applications, such as reconnaissance, and maybe more. Consider the 1931 launch of USS *Akron*, a dirigible capable of launching and retrieving fighters or reconnaissance planes, a sort of flying aircraft carrier. Alas, *Akron* ran into a severe thunderstorm off the coast of New Jersey on April 4, 1933. The airship crashed into the sea, killing all but three of the 76 crew members aboard. President Roosevelt called it a "national disaster."

The *Akron* tragedy spelled the end of the US Navy's experiments with airships. But the Germans pushed ahead with trials on the commercial use of dirigibles. By this time, the German airship *Graf Zeppelin* was in operation, an experimental passenger airship that crossed the Atlantic to America for the first time in 1928 and circumnavigated the world in 1929. In 1930, it began regular passenger service between Germany and Brazil, while the Zeppelin company set to work building an even bigger airship to make the lucrative transatlantic passenger run. Meanwhile, an early British airship, the R101, crashed on its maiden voyage, killing 48 of the 54 on board and putting an end to the British airship program.

But the Germans pressed ahead. In 1936, the Zeppelin company's biggest airship yet was launched. It was named *Hindenburg* in honor of the late German President. Germany's new Nazi government saw propaganda value in *Hindenburg*, the world's biggest airship and a triumph of German engineering. They put swastikas on the fins so everyone would get the point.

In the US, Pan American Airways began offering passenger air service from Florida to the Caribbean and Central and South America, and in 1937 transatlantic flights, and a year later the first transpacific passenger flights to Manila. Even so, it seemed there was a niche for airships. Airplanes were fast, but not particularly comfortable. Ocean liners were comfortable but slow. Airships hit the sweet spot in between; faster than ships, more luxurious than airplanes.

But I'm sure you already know how this story ends. After successfully shuttling passengers across the Atlantic from Germany to the US and Brazil 18 times, Hindenburg burst into flames and crashed while attempting to land at Lakehurst, New Jersey on May 6, 1937. An investigation at the time concluded the fire was caused by static electricity, though that conclusion is controversial and still disputed today. What is not in dispute is that Hindenburg was much more vulnerable to fire because it was filled with hydrogen, which burns. Helium was not available to the Germans because of the US export ban.

Of the 97 passengers and crew aboard *Hindenburg*, 35 were killed, along with one person on the ground. There were 62 survivors. A tragedy to be sure, but not so big a tragedy as *Titanic*, say, or even *Akron*. But it spelled the end of commercial development of airship travel. Perhaps prematurely, some argue, even in our time.

But it wasn't just the crash. It was the radio coverage of the crash. Newsreel cameras were covering *Hindenburg's* arrival and got vivid footage of the fire. But it was the dramatic audio narration by Herbert Morrison, reporting for radio station WLS in Chicago, that drove home the awfulness of the disaster. Morrison's stunned, horrified, real-time narration, punctuated by his memorable exclamation, "Oh, the humanity!" hit everyone who listened to it like a punch to the gut. Morrison's account was in fact being recorded for broadcast later, which is the reason why we still have it to listen to today. Morrison unwittingly, single-handedly, ended the era of the airship. But he also demonstrated the power of broadcast journalism.

I already mentioned that in the early days of radio, it was conceived of as an analog to a concert hall or a theatre. Much of early radio entertainment programming was performances of music or drama—essentially short audio plays, a different play every week.

Musical programs began with classical music, or "potted-plant music," but popular music soon took up most of the airtime. The Thirties saw the beginning of the big band era, and radio programs would often broadcast a band's performance live from a theatre or ballroom via a remote hookup.

From the early days, radio stations, especially in the Southern and Western United States began playing what was often called "old time fiddle music." This was the beginning of what we now call "country music" going mainstream. In 1924, WLS in Chicago began a program called National Barn Dance that was picked up by NBC and went national in 1933. In 1925, WSM in Nashville began its own copycat program, called WSM Barn Dance. In 1927, an announcer made a joke about the national network broadcasting grand opera, while WSM was broadcasting

what you might call Grand Ole Opry. The name stuck, and Grand Ole Opry concerts have been going ever since. Performing at the Grand Ole Opry became the pinnacle of success in country music, and Nashville became its capital.

Radio networks broadcast their best shows in the evening, when the audience was largest and therefore they could charge the most for their advertising. Daytime ad rates, by contrast, were just a fraction of what the evening programming brought in. The daytime audience was understood to be primarily women working at home. This was an attractive market for certain advertisers—processed foods, cleaning products, cosmetics, and medicines—products purchased primarily by women. But women working at home would also be busy. They might be playing the radio as they did housework or cooked dinner, but they wouldn't be listening closely, or so it was thought.

In the early years of radio, daytime advertisers put on instructional shows, offering recipes, beauty tips, and household hints aimed at the homemaker and, of course, incorporating the sponsor's products. By the early Thirties though, these shows were getting repetitious and their audience was getting bored. So what to do?

The answer came from Frank Hummert, a former Lord & Thomas ad executive who jumped ship to launch his own firm. Hummert was an innovator in the field. His most notable success was in printing recipes on the bags of Gold Medal Flour to induce consumers to buy it rather than other brands of flour when—let's face it—flour is pretty much the same. Hummert considered the question of what kind of entertainment program might hook the daytime audience. He considered the examples of film serials, comic strips, and *Amos 'n' Andy*, all of which told a long story over multiple episodes, often with cliffhanger endings to keep the audience engaged. He also considered newspaper advice columns, which were one of the most popular features for women readers. And he had an inspiration: a daily show, five days a week, with an open-ended story centered on its characters' relationships and romances.

Thus was born in 1933 *Ma Perkins*, the first network show of its type, sponsored by Procter & Gamble's laundry soap Oxydol. Like all successes on radio, this one was quickly imitated and by 1935, Procter & Gamble was the leading advertiser on radio. Shows sprung up across the networks, like 1933's *One Man's Family*, 1935's *Backstage Wife*, the story of Mary Noble, a little Iowa girl who married one of America's most handsome actors, Larry Noble, matinee idol of a million other women.

(Astute listeners will immediately recognize a parallel here, to radio comedians Bob and Ray's famous parody production, *Mary Backstayge, Noble Wife*. In our time, Bob and Ray's parody is much more famous than the original show, which has largely been forgotten.)

There's also 1936's *John's Other Wife*, about John and his wife and his other wife, that is, his secretary, and 1937's *The Guiding Light*, the all-time record holder for longevity; it ran on radio and then television until 2009.

It was in 1938 that the name “soap opera” was coined to describe these shows, derived by analogy to “horse opera,” a half-affectionate, half-derogatory term that had already been in use to describe Hollywood Westerns. Soap opera became so thoroughly a part of radio that a joke from the period has a grandfather telling his little granddaughter, “You know, they didn’t have radio when I was your age,” to which the little girl replies, “Then how did they sell soap?”

Soon after soap operas took off, advertisers realized that by late in the afternoon, moms were working on dinner, but children were coming home from school, which led to afternoon serials aimed at a young audience, shows like 1933’s *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy* and 1938’s *Captain Midnight*. And while newspaper comic strips such as *Blondie* and *Dick Tracy* and *Gasoline Alley* were already being adapted into radio shows for adult audiences, the year 1930 saw the introduction of the kid-friendly *Little Orphan Annie* series, which ran on NBC Blue until 1942.

Little Orphan Annie was in a class by itself. Unlike the comic strip, which in the 1930s was pushing an explicit right-wing, anti-New Deal political line, the radio program was as soothing and uncontroversial as a mug of hot chocolate. Appropriately, since the show’s first sponsor was Ovaltine, a powder made from cocoa and malt and sold as a flavoring agent to be mixed with hot or cold milk.

Ovaltine was heavily marketed on the show, and listeners were invited to send in Ovaltine proofs of purchase to receive premiums, such as an Ovaltine mug, and most famously, a Little Orphan Annie secret decoder ring. Late in the show, the announcer would read out a coded message that could be decoded with the ring, which gave a clue usually related to tomorrow’s episode.

I have more to say about programming during the Golden Age of Radio, but alas, I will have to save it for next week, and we’ll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank Jordon for his kind donation, and thank you to Eirik for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Jordon and Eirik help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you’d like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it’s my own work, sometimes it’s licensed, but many times, the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you’re there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today’s show.

And I hope you’ll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue this story and look at the evolution of radio entertainment programs during the 1930s,

into what we now think of as the Golden Age of Radio. That's next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In talking about the *Little Orphan Annie* radio serial, I would be remiss if I did not mention radio humorist Jean Shepherd, who made a career out of telling stories on the radio, and sometimes in print, often based on his reminiscences of growing up in Indiana. One of Shepherd's short stories is entitled, "The Counterfeit Secret Circle Member Gets the Message, or The Asp Strikes Again." In the story, narrator Ralphie Parker, an avid fan of the *Little Orphan Annie* radio program, sends away for the secret decoder ring, and after waiting impatiently for its arrival, eagerly decodes one of the secret messages, which turns out to be nothing more than yet another plug for Ovaltine.

The real *Little Orphan Annie* series never sank quite that far, but it makes a good story. It was included in Shepherd's compilation novel/memoir *In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash*. It was published in 1966 and became a best seller. Five stories from that book, and a few more published elsewhere were adapted into a 1983 film directed by Bob Clark, starring Peter Billingsley as Raphie Parker, and with Shepherd himself providing the narration as the adult Ralphie Parker, reminiscing on his childhood.

The film, titled *A Christmas Story*, because the main storyline is Christmas-themed, was released during the 1983 holiday season to modest success, but over the years that followed, the film gradually became a beloved holiday favorite and has been adapted into a stage play and a musical, and led to a number of sequel productions.

[music: Closing Theme]