

Newsweek

May 18, 1942

RADIO

King and Queen McGee

Molly and Fibber ('Taint Funny) McGee are next-door neighbors to 30,000,000 people. Every Tuesday evening (9:30-10 EWT) they hold open house to radio's largest audience, over 120 American stations (NBC) and 34 Canadian.

Last week their leadership was made official. The Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting (Crossley report) announced that Fibber McGee and Molly had topped the season's averages in its 1941-42 winter survey. They had a rating of 36.5* against 36.4 for Edgar Bergen's Charlie McCarthy, 1939-40 champion, and 36.2 for Jack Benny, who led the 1940-41 survey. It was a photo finish, but the homespun pair of childhood sweethearts from Peoria, Ill., had established themselves indisputably as comedy's king and queen.

In private life they are Jim and Marian Jordan and they're just as folksy off the air as on. Neighbors call them the McGees. They live on a 3½-acre tract at Encino (population, 2,500) in California's San Fernando Valley, in a white colonial house that is not magnificent but nice.

Jim is 46, 5 feet 5, plump, and pleasant. On the strength of a campaign for proper garbage collections and fire equipment, he's just been elected to a second term as president of the Encino Chamber of Commerce, a job he takes very seriously. He's an air-raid warden, too. And found time to make most of the furniture for his home on the woodworking machinery in his playhouse shop.

Marian is one year younger than Jim, almost as tall, of similar build, blue-eyed, and blonde. She still laughs—spontaneously, not dutifully—at jokes her husband has been telling for sixteen years. They have two children. Kathryn, 20, acts in radio; Jim Jr., 18, attends the University of Southern California.

Formalities are few at the Jordan home. The whole family has a passion for answering the telephone, and when it rings four voices may answer on as many extensions and carry on collective chitchat with the caller. All four like to hunt, too. A family trip to Alaska last summer bagged four black bears which now are rugs. Jim doesn't often tell their best hunting story—how Jim Jr., killed two deer with one shot—because he thinks it sounds too phony to be believed.

Many McGee programs are roughed into shape right at the Jordan home before the couple go down to the NBC building for final rehearsal. Vaudeville training makes them love to work before an audience and their shows are always packed. After all their years of trouping, both still are nervous before the show goes on.

*Meaning that of every 1,000 families asked, 365 said they had listened.