

October 4, 2021

Gilligan's Island - (Pilot) was filmed in November of 1963 but did not air until October 16, 1992.

The show's creator and executive producer Sherwood Schwartz began pitching the idea for this series to CBS in June of 1963. None of the executives at CBS wanted to give this show a chance.

The pilot was filmed on the beach at Kauai, Hawaii. With only one day left of filming to go, this production was shut down in November 1963 due to the assassination of President Kennedy. When filming resumed days later, the location was moved to Honolulu City Harbor. After more delays, the filming finally concluded on November 27, 1963. When it was previewed for the CBS executives in December of 1963, they all hated it. Schwartz, then re-edited the show and wrote the now famous theme song. It was resubmitted to the CBS executives in January of 1964. While still not completely satisfied, they did notice the improvement and previewed the show for audiences, who loved it. After a lot of rejection, rewriting and recasting, the network gave the go ahead for 13 episodes to be shot. The critic's reviews for the show were horrible, but the audience loved it.

When the show was finally in production, the filming location was moved to the CBS Studio Center (the former Mack Sennett Studios) in Studio City. A four foot deep lagoon was constructed along with access to Stage 2 on the lot.

Gilligan's Island was in the top 20 shows in the ratings within a few weeks. The series lasted for 98 episodes over three seasons. The first season was filmed in black and white while the

remaining two seasons were filmed in color. The show was renewed for a fourth season, but was cancelled when CBS President William Paley wanted his favorite show *Gunsmoke* reinstated after *IT* had been cancelled. As a result of this reinstatement, another program had to go. That program, despite still respectable ratings, was *Gilligan's Island*.

The Gilligan's Island theme song was introduced during season one. The lyrics were changed in season two to include the words "the Professor and Mary Ann".

The Many Loves Of Dobie Gillis director Rod Amateau suggested Bob Denver to Sherwood Schwartz for the title role.

Schwartz's first choice to play the part of Gilligan was **Jerry Van Dyke** who thought the script was the worst he had ever read. Van Dyke's agent decided against this role for his client and instead pushed him to star in *My Mother The Car*. Van Dyke later admitted he regretted that decision.

According to Sherwood Schwartz, Gilligan's first name was "Willy". He picked the name Gilligan while looking for ideas in the telephone book.

Bob Denver - Before playing the part of Gilligan, he was known as Maynard G. Krebs on *The Many Loves Of Dobie Gillis*. At the age of 23, Denver was teaching Physical Education, math and history at a Catholic school in Pacific Palisades when he shot the pilot for *Dobie Gillis*. He had also spent time as a postal worker before leaving his educational job for television when the sitcom was picked up in 1959. He briefly appeared on *The Andy Griffith Show* as Dud Walsh in the episode titled *Divorce, Mountain Style*.

The Colorado state capital was named for James William Denver, the great-great-grandfather of Bob Denver.

In the brief one-year gap between *Dobie Gillis* and *Gilligan's Island*, from 1963 to 1964, Denver popped up in a handful of interesting roles. He memorably played Dud Wash in "Divorce, Mountain Style," a season-four highlight of *The Andy Griffith Show*. He appeared on an episode of the sitcom *The Farmer's Daughter* as well as dramatic roles particularly on *Dr. Kildare*, as Dr. Paul Garrett. Denver appeared in an episode titled "If You Can't Believe the Truth" with Ken Berry (*F Troop*, *Mayberry R.F.D.*) and Barbara Eden (*I Dream of Jeannie*).

Many sources credit *Dr. Kildare* as Denver's only dramatic performance. However, you can find Denver in one other drama series, the naval adventure series *The Silent Service*. Denver made his screen debut in a bit part in "The Tang's Last Shot" in 1957. He played a soldier aboard a submarine.

Alan Hale, Jr. - was the son of character actor Alan Hale, Sr. Jr. appeared in more than 200 films and television roles beginning in 1941. During World War II, Hale served in the United States Coast Guard. By the 1950's, Hale began to work in television. By 1952, he was starring in CBS's *Biff Baker, U.S.A.* The series was canceled in 1954. He continued his career in guest roles on other series such as *The Range Rider*, *Annie Oakley*, *Fury* and *Northwest Passage*. In the 1960's, Hale guest starred in roles on episodes of *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *The Real McCoys*, *Mister Ed*, *Hawaiian Eye*, *Adventures In Paradise*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Lassie* and *Hazel*. He was also featured in two episodes of *Perry Mason*. According to creator and producer Sherwood Schwartz, he interviewed between 30 to 40 people for the role of the

skipper. **Carroll O'Connor** originally read for the part of the Skipper however, series creator Sherwood Schwartz rejected him.

Jim Backus - was born James Gilmore Backus in Cleveland, Ohio. Backus was acting on radio as early as 1940. From 1952 to 1955, Backus co-starred in the situation comedy *I Married Joan* portraying Judge Bradley Stevens, the husband of Joan Davis. He is best remembered as the voice of the nearsighted cartoon character Mr. Magoo and also as Thurston Howell III on *Gilligan's Island* for three seasons, 1964 to 1967 and later in reunion TV films made between 1978 and 1981. He was Sherwood Schwartz's first choice to play that role.

Natalie Schafer - She was 63 years old when the pilot was filmed, but kept her age a secret for many years from the cast members. Schafer had said she initially did the pilot to *Gilligan's Island* (1964), for the free trip to Hawaii. Afterwards, Schafer was in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on holiday when she got a telegram from the States. She read it and burst into tears. Everyone had thought Schafer's mother (who was ill at the time) had died and offered their condolences. Schafer had said no she didn't die, the reason she was crying was because the pilot for *Gilligan's Island* sold and she had to stay in Los Angeles and could not move back to New York City.

Kit Smythe (Ginger Grant) - was originally supposed to be a secretary, not a movie star. She was replaced by Tina Louise who proved to be the most difficult performer on this series. Smythe would go on to appear in television series such as *Bewitched* (1964), *The Farmer's Daughter* (1965), *Burke's Law* (1965) and *Gunsmoke* (1966). Smythe's final television acting performance was in an episode of *Police Woman* in 1976. As of 2005, Smythe

was performing as a showgirl in *The Fabulous Palm Springs Follies* in Palm Springs, California until the show closed in 2014.

Nancy McCarthy (Bunny) - also appeared in two other unaired TV pilots: a spin off pilot of *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* called *Zelda* with Sheila James and on *The Peter Lorre Playhouse*. She appeared in several live television plays produced in New York including *True Story*, *Divorce Court*, and *Moment of Fear* with Robert Redford on the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* series. She retired from acting in 1972 due to a back injury.

After Kit Smythe was released, **Jayne Mansfield** was asked to play the part of Ginger Grant. While she was performing in the play *Bus Stop*, she fell in love with the play's director, Matt Cimber. He and Mansfield were married in September of 1964. Mansfield was offered the part of Ginger Grant on *Gilligan's Island*, but rejected the role taking the bad advice of her husband, Matt Cimber.

Tina Louise (Ginger Grant) - Born Tina Blacker, the name "Louise" was apparently suggested by her drama teacher during her senior year in high school when Tina shared that she was the only girl in the class without a middle name. In her Broadway debut, she was in "Li'l Abner", where she played Apassionata Von Climax and shared her dressing room with another actress making her Broadway debut in the same play, Julie Newmar.

While being best remembered for playing Ginger Grant on *Gilligan's Island* (1964), she hated the role and did not appear in any of the series' various reunion specials. She stated often that the show had ruined her career. According to Russell Johnson, Tina was told she would be the main star of the series. After arriving in Los Angeles to do the show, she found out otherwise.

Johnson also recalls that while Tina remained professional during the series' run, she "divorced herself from the show as soon as it went off the air". However, after the death of Dawn Wells in December 2020, Louise denied any longtime rumors that she resented the role of Ginger Grant.

Dawn Wells (Mary Ann Summers) - The role of Bunny was rewritten and renamed Mary Ann Summers. Dawn Wells, who was Miss Nevada 1959 and then went on to the Miss America Pageant, was promised the part. At the last minute a young actress named **Raquel Welch** auditioned for this part. However, Schwartz felt Dawn Wells was more suited for this role. During the show's run, "Mary Ann" was the most popular among fans and fan mail.

Tina Louise and Dawn Wells had a mutual dislike and did not speak to each other for years. According to Tina Louise, "Dawn and I have never been close, we just never clicked. She was very much about pleasing everyone and I have never been that way."

Russell Johnson (Professor Roy Hinkley) - was a well-known character actor, starring in several Westerns and Sci-Fi classics as *This Island Earth* (1955) and *It Came from Outer Space* (1953). Johnson said he was not a bright student and was in fact held back a grade. Johnson did redeem himself later on in his school career and made the National Honor Society in high school. He joined the Army Air Corps in World War II and earned the Purple Heart. After the war, he used the G.I. Bill to enroll in acting school to learn his new trade.

Johnson auditioned for the title role on the television series *Ben Casey* (1961), but lost out to actor Vince Edwards.

Had played the same character (Professor Roy Hinkley) on six different series: *Gilligan's Island* (1964), *The New Adventures of Gilligan* (1974), *Gilligan's Planet* (1982), *ALF* (1986), *New Monkees* (1987) and *Meego* (1997).

Johnson was quoted as saying, "Old actors never die, they don't even fade away. They're always available."

John Gabriel (Professor Roy Hinkley) - According to Gabriel, "It was the first time in my adult life that I remember weeping. And I think part of that has to do with the fact that I built this thing up to such a degree it was going to be my breakthrough". He would go on to appear on several soap operas including *Ryan's Hope*, *Days Of Our Lives* and *Generations*. **Dabney Coleman** was one of the many actors who read for this role of the professor before the final selection of Russell Johnson. Sherwood Schwartz and the network felt that John Gabriel did not have the maturity to be the professor.

REFERENCES

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Mister Ed - Pilot Number 1

The Wonderful World Of Wilbur Pope

The character first appeared in the short story "The Talking Horse" by children's author **Walter R. Brooks** in the September 18, 1937, issue of Liberty magazine.

UCLA graduate Sonia Chernus began working at Warner Brothers as a secretary in the 1940's, eventually moving up to be a reader and story editor under director Arthur Lubin. She was a fan of Walter Brooks' short stories about the talking horse and pushed the idea for a series. She introduced Arthur Lubin to Walter Brooks. Development of the concept for this show began. For this, she earned the atypical screen credit of "Format Developed by Sonia Chernus."

Francis The Talking Mule was a series of seven films (1950 to 1956) with Donald O'Connor starring in six of them. Arthur Lubin directed six of them as well. Francis was a mule named Molly. Chill Wills provided the voice for Francis.

The Colgate Comedy Hour - Eddie Cantor and Horse (aired November 29, 1953) In this segment, the horse did not speak to Cantor, the audience only heard his thoughts.

Arthur Lubin wanted to bring the talking horse concept to television with producer George Burns.

A pilot, *Wilbur Pope and Mr. Ed* was filmed in 1958, but did not air until October 6, 2009. This pilot used a script that was nearly identical to what was used on the series premiere a few years later.

Scott McKay (Wilbur Pope) - was known for his versatility in a series of comedies and dramas that ranged from such classics as *Arms and the Man* to *Born Yesterday*. Scott McKay made his Broadway debut in 1939 in *The American Way* and the following year toured as Sandy in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. He succeeded Tom Poston as Bob McKellaway in *Mary, Mary* at the Helen Hayes Theatre in New York and toured with it nationally. On television he was seen in many segments of *Play of the Week*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and the *United States Steel Hour*. He was once married to film actress Ann Sheridan.

Sandra White (Carlotta Pope) - was born Sandra Jean Solomon in 1930. In 1948, she moved to California to pursue a career as a screen actress Sandra White. While under contract to Paramount Studios, she performed in featured roles such as Fritz Lang's 1956 *While the City Sleeps* and Frank Tashlin's 1956 rock and roll musical *The Girl Can't Help It*. White also had guest roles in television series *77 Sunset Strip*, *Hennessey*, *Arrest and Trial*, and *Father Knows Best*. She retired from acting in 1961.

Eddie Albert turned down the role of Wilbur. He also turned down the lead role in *My Three Sons* as he wanted to focus on his film career at the time.

Mister Ed - Pilot Number 2 - Episode Title: The First Meeting. Aired on Wednesday, January 4, 1961 in syndication.

Filmed at General Service Studios 1040 North Las Palmas Avenue in Hollywood.

Alan Young (Wilbur) - was born Angus Young in North Shields, Northumberland in northern England. After relocating the family to Edinburgh, Scotland, his father decided to move them to Canada. He landed a spot in a talent show hosted by the local Scottish Caledonia Society, which led to a regular spot on Vancouver's CJOR radio station and eventually his own show on the national Canadian station CBC. There he was heard by a New York-based agent who hired him as a summer replacement for Eddie Cantor. In the late 1940s, he was hosting his own show and playing a supporting role on Jimmy Durante's radio show. He appeared in George Pal's MGM musical *Tom Thumb* in 1958 and played opposite Rod Taylor in *The Time Machine* in 1960. According to Alan Young, it was producer George Burns who convinced director Arthur Lubin to hire Alan Young for the part of Wilbur Post. Burns said "He looks like the kind of a guy a horse would talk to." According to Alan Young, his favorite scene in the entire series was when he first heard Mr. Ed speak to him. After Mr. Ed ended, he was able to work as a voice actor in *Battle of the Planets*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, *The Smurfs*, and *The Ren and Stimpy Show*. He also made guest appearances on programs such as *The Love Boat*, *Murder, She Wrote*, *Doogie Howser, M.D.* and *ER*.

Connie Hines (Carol) - was born into a family of performers in Dedham, Massachusetts. As a teenager, she married an insurance salesman and moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where she modeled

and acted on radio and in theatrical productions. After her divorce, she moved to New York and studied with the Helen Hayes Equity Group. In 1958, she became a regular contestant on the game show *Dotto*. When the show was found to have been rigged, Hines was called to testify about being coached to give correct answers. She made several guest appearances on American television shows such as *Bachelor Father*, *Perry Mason* and *Sea Hunt*. After her time on *Mister Ed*, Hines made only a few television guest appearances on shows such as *Bonanza*, *Love, American Style*, and *The Mod Squad* before retiring from acting. She married producer and entertainment lawyer Lee Savin in 1970.

Larry Keating - became a radio announcer for NBC in the 1940s and toured with Bob Hope on his military camp shows during World War II. In 1953, he took over the role of George Burns and Gracie Allen's neighbor Harry Morton on *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* and continued the role on *The George Burns Show* when Gracie Allen retired in 1958. According to Alan Young, "Larry Keating did something in comedy that Charlie Chaplin advised everybody. If you're being funny, don't be funny doing it." Keating contracted leukemia in early 1963, but continued working on *Mister Ed* until a week before his death, on August 26, 1963.

Edna Skinner (not seen in the pilot) - Her big break came when she was hired by Rodgers & Hammerstein to replace Celeste Holm as Ado Annie in their original Broadway production of *Oklahoma!* She made her feature film debut in 1948 in the Frank Sinatra and Kathryn Grayson film *The Kissing Bandit*. In 1953, she landed the role of Maggie the cook on the television version of *Topper*. In 1963, when Larry Keating died, the *Mister Ed*

producers considered keeping her character on the show as a widow living with her brother Paul Fenton, played by Jack Albertson. Instead, the producers decided to get rid of her character after the ninth episode during Season 4. **Leon Ames** and **Florence MacMichael** were added as the new next door neighbors, Gordon and Winnie Kirkwood.

Mr. Ed - The first horse that played Mister Ed for the first, unaired pilot episode was a chestnut gelding. The horse proved to be unruly and difficult to work with and was replaced with the horse named Bamboo Harvester a crossbred gelding of American Saddlebred, Arabian and grade ancestry. Les Hilton, who trained Francis The Talking Mule, was hired to train Bamboo Harvester. A second pilot episode was filmed and Bamboo Harvester (1949 - 1968) remained with the series until its cancellation. There was also a stunt double named Pumpkin who looked identical, save for a gold spot on the horse's white patch. The crew would cover up the patch with makeup when shooting scenes.

Allan "Rocky" Lane - was the voice of Mr. Ed for the first unaired pilot episode and for the entire series that followed. According to Alan Young and Connie Hines, the producers tried to replace Rocky Lane because he irritated so many people. Several people were auditioned as a replacement, but none of them were good enough. Lane stayed on and received a raise.

Howard Wendell - made multiple appearances on programs such as *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, *Dragnet*, *Bonanza*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Adventures Of Ozzie and Harriet*.

Jason Johnson - In a career that spanned nearly 30 years, he could be seen in over 100 roles in shows such as *The Tales Of Wells Fargo*, *Have Gun Will Travel* and *Lassie*.

The make-up artist for the *Mr. Ed* series was **Jack Pierce** who created the design for the make-up of Frankenstein, The Mummy and The Wolf Man.

The lyrics to the famous theme song ("A horse is a horse, of course, of course ...") played over the opening and closing credits were introduced in season one, episode eight, "Pageant Show". The first seven episodes used only an instrumental version of the song.

Jay Livingston sang the theme tune as a demo, intending to get a professional singer to re-do it, but the producers liked his vocals, and kept Livingston's version in the show.

CBS refused to put the production on its network in its initial premiere in 1960, so the Studebaker Corporation purchased this show and put it into syndication. It was an instant hit and CBS bought it in 1961.

During the first season, animating the horse's mouth was a procedure created by Les Hilton. The horse always wore a halter with a fishing line running through it to his teeth moving the line back and forth. This did not cause the horse any pain.

In 2004, a *Mr. Ed* remake was planned for the Fox network with Sherman Hemsley as the voice of Mister Ed, David Alan Basche as Wilbur and Sherilyn Fenn as Carlotta. A teenage daughter named Amanda played by Sara Paxton was added to the cast in an attempt to appeal to a younger audience. Executive Producer

Drake Sather committed suicide before the show's release. The pilot was never sold.

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