

WILLARD WATERMAN BIO

Willard Lewis Waterman (August 29, 1914, Madison, Wisconsin – February 2, 1995, Burlingame, California) was a character actor in films, TV and on radio, remembered best for succeeding Harold Peary as the title character of *The Great Gildersleeve* at the height of that show's popularity.

Peary was unable to convince sponsor and show owner Kraft Cheese to allow him an ownership stake in the show. Impressed with better capital-gains deals CBS was willing to offer performers in the high-tax late 1940s, he decided to move from NBC to CBS during the latter's famous talent raids. Kraft, however, refused to move the show to CBS and hired Waterman to replace Peary as the stentorian Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve.

Waterman attended the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s, where he acted in student plays and was a friend of Uta Hagen. He began his radio career in Chicago, where he met and replaced Peary on *Tom Mix, Ralston Sharpshooter*. Not only did the two men become longtime friends, but Waterman's own booming voice resembled Peary's almost exactly. Waterman, who looked as though he could have been Peary's brother, refused to appropriate Peary's familiar trademark, the half-leering, half-embarrassed Gildersleeve laugh. Waterman stayed with *The Great Gildersleeve* from 1950 to 1957 on radio and in an ill-fated television version syndicated in 1955.

At the same time he was heard as Gildersleeve, Waterman had a recurring role as Mr. Merriweather in the short-lived but respected radio comedy vehicle for Ronald Colman and his wife Benita Hume, *The Halls of Ivy*. Waterman's pre-Gildersleeve radio career, in addition to *Tom Mix*, had included at least one starring vehicle, a short-lived situation comedy, *Those Websters*, that premiered in 1945. He also had radio roles between the mid-1930s and 1950 on such shows as *Chicago Theater of the Air* (variety) and *Harold Teen* (comedy), plus four soap operas: *Girl Alone*, *The Guiding Light*, *Lonely Women*, *The Road of Life* and *Kay Fairchild*, *Stepmother*.

Information from Wikipedia.