

Raymond Edward Johnson

Raymond Edward Johnson was born in Kenosha, Wis. in 1911. He worked as a bank teller, and then studied acting at the Goodman School of Drama in Chicago. His sister, Dora Johnson Remington, who died in 1989, was a radio soap opera actress, best known for playing Evey Fitz, the married daughter in *Ma Perkins*.

Mr. Johnson was a familiar presence in the radio serials of the 1940's and won acclaim playing Thomas Jefferson in Sidney Kingsley's 1943 Broadway play *The Patriots*. But he was best known as Raymond, the original host for the gothic tales of *Inner Sanctum*, which made its debut in January 1941 and ran for 11 years, on NBC, CBS and ABC. After three bars of organ music, *Inner Sanctum* opened with the sound of Raymond turning a doorknob and then the creaking of rusted hinges. "Good evening, friends," intoned Raymond. "This is your host, inviting you through the gory portals of the squeaking door." Then came a gruesome joke, laughter intended to make his listeners shiver, and finally an improbable episode with ghosts and bloodcurdling sound effects. Himan Brown, the director of *Inner Sanctum*, stated long afterward. "All I used was a creaking door. There are only two sounds in radio that are trademarked -- the creaking door and the NBC chimes." When the stories -- featuring actors like Boris Karloff, Paul Lukas, Peter Lorre, Claude Rains and Raymond Massey -- reached their climax, Raymond offered another round of macabre laughter. Then he concluded the evening by wishing his listeners "pleasant dreams."

Mr. Johnson also played the lead role in *Don Winslow of the Navy* and *Mandrake the Magician* as well as the Librarian in *The Crime Club* in his busy radio career. In the summer of 1945, after four years of mail fan sometimes accompanied by oil cans for that creaking door, Mr. Johnson stepped down as host of *Inner Sanctum* and was replaced by Paul McGrath. By then, Mr. Johnson had achieved success in his Broadway debut as Jefferson in *The Patriots*, a tribute to democratic ideals in a wartime America fighting fascism. While appearing in the play, he continued as the host of *Inner Sanctum* on Sunday nights.

Mr. Johnson, who suffered from multiple sclerosis for many years, nevertheless revisited his starring years in radio in 1997, when he appeared at a gathering of the Friends of Old Time Radio. He delivered a reading from a portable bed.

His co-star on *Inner Sanctum* was not always a reliable presence, as Terry Ross, a soundman, recalled in telling how a young man setting up the equipment once tried too hard to please. "We got the hinges and buried them in the dirt out back and watered them down like plants for a couple of weeks or so, till they got nice and rusty, then mounted them on the door a little bit askew, so they would squeak," Mr. Ross recalled in an interview for Leonard Maltin's *Great American Broadcast* (Dutton, 1997). "One of the setup boys came to me and said: 'Terry, I fixed the door for you. I oiled the hinges.' This was just before showtime. What do you do when the signature of the show was a squeaky door?" Mr. Ross became the door. He imitated its creak with his voice, and Raymond and the eerie plot did the rest.

Raymond Edward Johnson died on Aug. 15, 2001 in Wallingford, Conn. He was 90.

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