

Joseph Kearns

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Joseph Kearns (February 12, 1907 – February 17, 1962) was an American actor, who is best remembered for his role as George Wilson ("Mr. Wilson") in the CBS television series *Dennis the Menace* from 1959 until his death in 1962.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, Kearns's family moved to California when he was very young. He went to college at the University of Utah at Salt Lake City, where he earned his tuition by teaching a course in theatrical makeup. Kearns started in radio and theatre as a pipe organist. Later, he built his Hollywood home around a Wurlitzer theater pipe organ.

He began his acting career in radio in the 1930s (playing the Crazyquilt Dragon in the serial "The Cinnamon Bear"), becoming active during the 1940s, with appearances on the shows *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, *Burns and Allen*, *My Little Margie*, *I Married Joan*, *December Bride*, *It's a Great Life*, Walter Brennan's *The Real McCoys* (in the 1957 episode "You Can't Cheat an Honest Man"), and Ronald W. Reagan's *General Electric Theater*. On *Suspense*, he was almost a mainstay, heard regularly as the host "The Man in Black" in the early years, announcing many episodes in the later run, and playing supporting and occasional lead roles in hundreds of shows throughout the series' tenure in Hollywood, from judges to kindly old-timers to cowards.

His best-remembered radio role was that of Ed, the security guard for Jack Benny's underground money vault, on *The Jack Benny Program*. The 'running gag' was that Benny had kept Ed on duty at the vault's door so long that the guard was not conversant with current events. When Benny informed him that "The War (World War II) had ended," Ed asked whether the "North" or the "South" had won, assuming that the American Civil War was the one Benny was referring to. He was also the first actor to play the part of Matt Grebb, one of a pair of police detectives in the radio version of the procedural cop series *The Lineup*, relinquishing the role to Wally Maher in 1951. He appeared in regular roles on *The Mel Blanc Show* and *The Harold Peary Show*.^[*citation needed*]

Kearns made his film debut in *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951). He was the voice of the Doorknob in Disney's animated film, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951). Kearns appeared in other movies, making his final film appearance as the crime photographer in *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959).

On television, Kearns reprised his radio roles on *The Jack Benny Program* and also appeared with Eve Arden and Richard Crenna in eight episodes of *Our Miss Brooks* (1953–1955) as Superintendent Stone, a role that he had played on radio.

Kearns played Fred, a neighbor of the fictitious child psychologist Dr. Tom Wilson, portrayed by Stephen Dunne (1918–1977), in the short-lived 1955 CBS sitcom, *Professional Father*. Phyllis Coates, later the first Lois Lane in *The Adventures of Superman*, played Fred's wife, Madge. Barbara Billingsley, later of *Leave It to Beaver*, and Beverly Washburn, a prominent child actress, also starred in this series.^[*citation needed*]

	Joseph Kearns
Born	February 12, 1907 <div>Salt Lake City, Utah, U.S.</div>
Died	February 17, 1962 (aged 55) <div>Los Angeles, California, U.S.</div>
Occupation	Actor
Years active	1930s–1962

From 1957-59, Kearns appeared as Augustus P. Tobey in eight episodes of *How to Marry a Millionaire*, based on the 1953 Marilyn Monroe film of the same name. Co-stars Barbara Eden and Merry Anders as Loco Jones and Michelle "Mike" Page, portrayed young women in New York City seeking millionaire husbands.

His final role was as George Wilson in CBS's *Dennis the Menace* based on the comic strip by Hank Ketcham. Kearns died of a cerebral hemorrhage during the third season of *Dennis the Menace* at the age of 55.

He was replaced by Gale Gordon, who played George Wilson's brother John. On the last episode that aired before Kearns's death, "Where There's a Will", the story dealt with Mr. Wilson making out a will and explaining that Dennis would inherit his gold watch when he dies. The last episode Kearns filmed was titled "The man next door" which was episode 100 and shown on May 6, 1962. George's wife remained for a few more episodes with George's uncle showing up for episode 102 and then John Wilson from then on. There were references to George being 'back east' in subsequent episodes.

Selected filmography

- *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959)
- *The Gift of Love* (1958)
- *Our Miss Brooks* (1956)
- *Alice in Wonderland* (voice) (1951)
- *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951)

External links

- Joseph Kearns (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0444012/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- Great Character Actors: Joseph Kearns (http://www.douglmacaulay.com/kingspud/sel_by_actor_index_2.php?actor_first=Joseph&actor_last=Kearns)
- Joseph Kearns (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=5434>) at Find a Grave

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