

Ma Perkins Encyclopedia Article

Ma Perkins

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Ma Perkins

A pioneering soap opera, *Ma Perkins* was heard on daytime radio for close to 30 years. For most of that time it was sponsored by Procter & Gamble's Oxydol soap flakes. The 15 minute show began in 1933 and did not leave the air until 1960. For several years it was broadcast on both NBC and CBS. The busy team of Frank and Anne Hummert produced the show and one of the initial scriptwriters was Robert Hardy Andrews, who also wrote *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy* in its earliest radio days.

Ma, dubbed "America's mother of the air," was a feisty widow who ran a lumberyard in the town of Rushville Center. The small town was both folksy and turbulent and Ma was equal parts maternal figure, therapist, and busybody. Virginia Payne, actually in her early twenties when the show commenced, played the sixty-something Ma for the entire run of the show. The commercials relied on the irritation factor, usually repeating the product name at least two dozen times per episode. It has been estimated that in the lifetime of *Ma Perkins* the program "helped sell over 3 billion boxes of Oxydol."

Further Reading:

Dunning, John. *On The Air*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Swasy, Alecia. *Soap Opera: The Inside Story of Procter & Gamble*. New York, Touchstone, 1994.