

# Assignment TV

By **TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY**

NEW YORK CITY—Once this was the television capital of the world but long ago it sold out to Hollywood. In the early 1950s New York was a television columnist's paradise and the big names of the entertainment world were in lights over every TV studio in town. I recall one day in 1953 when I had breakfast with Jackie Gleason, coffee with Tallulah Bankhead, lunch with Eleanor Roosevelt, cocktails with Eddie Cantor and dinner with Milton Berle. Lest that sound like a social calendar, let me assure you that if a chimpanzee had been filling this space, they would have been lunching with him instead.

TODAY NO one is left but Garry Moore and even he's leaving next season. Even so, when I called the NBC Press Department I thought the man was kidding when he said, "How about an interview with Sally Rand?"

"Fine," I answered, "but why not try Milton Sills or Blanche Sweet first."

"I'm not kidding! Sally Rand is the biggest star we've had around here since Florian Zabach. If you want the television 'greats' like Snooky Lanson and Horace Heidt,

you'll simply have to go to Hollywood. Hell, there hasn't been a big television story around here since the McGuire Sisters took up gambling. How about Pat Boone? He's in Bel-Air but I can arrange a telephone interview. Stick around. If Sally Rand goes over big we may also revive Sophie Tucker."

I BEGAN to realize that Hal March was right when he said: "It is now obvious to anyone in this business that an actor must go to Hollywood or be rich enough to spend most of the year in retirement." March is moving to Hollywood in July, where he is preparing a new TV show. He couldn't find any writers in New York to develop the scripts.

"All the best writers left for California a long time ago and those who are left in New York admit they would be willing to change their address for a one-way ticket west."

So I settled for Sally Rand who is narrating a documentary for NBC. But the man called back. "Miss Rand is out of town doing a charity performance in White Plains."

And so it went. But who ever felt sorry for a television columnist?

ODDLY ENOUGH the westward migration has left behind the top quality live programs plus news, documentaries, and the soap operas.

The Hallmark Hall of Fame, the NBC Opera Company, and the Bell Telephone Hour are among the quality shows which remain because of the nearness to the New York music world. The others are documentaries such as "Twentieth Century," "CBS Reports," the news specials and the unusual creative efforts such as "Saga of Western Man," and "Chronicle."

Gleason is the only big TV name left in Manhattan

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