Rube Goldberg
His Life, Times, Comics, Inventions, and Lunacy
Cartooning's Renaissance Man

The Many Comic Inventions of Rube Goldberg

By Jim Ivey

"Rube Goldberg"
You'll find it in the dictionary.
It was good natured, zany, breezy, thought provoking, full of fun.
It was born in Independence Day, 1883, and passed away on Pearl Harbor Day, 1970.
It smoked cigars.
"It" was one of the greatest cartoonists of all time.

Gerald W. Johnson described Rube Goldberg as a satirist—not of fads and fancies—but of rationality.
Satirist of rationality. That was Rube at his best.
Goldberg's work was always good humored. There was never any malice.
He tackled almost every type of cartoon—sports, comic and adventure strips, animation, political, advertising, book illustration and a type of cartoon no one has been able to come close to emulating: what he liked to call his human interest cartoons of 1910-34. Few have shown so much versatility.
Rube dabbled in vaudeville, doing chalktalks. He wrote a song based on a cartoon series, *I'm the Guy*. He tried animating his cartoons with success until he discovered it took too much of his time and energy doing all of the many drawings required for animation.

Goldberg quit cartooning in 1924 after a disastrous attempt at writing and drawing a continuity strip. He turned to humor articles and short stories for popular magazines, which he had previously contributed. (He also had written the screenplay for the Three Stooges movie *Soup to Nuts* in 1930, but found working conditions too harsh to continue in Hollywood.)

Goldberg returned to cartooning in 1936 with a new strip, *Lala PaLooa*, but this fizzled in less than two years; he drew yet another Sunday cartoon, *Sideshow*, until 1940.

In 1936, he entered an entirely new field—political cartooning. He drew for the *New York Sun*, and won the Pulitzer Prize 10 years later.

By 1946 he'd tired of the political scene, but he had already found his new challenge—comic sculpture.

As his long-time assistant, Warren King, said: "Work was his nutrition...he was a perfectionist and worked tirelessly, saying, 'What else is there to do?'

He was good-humored, handsome, erect (even in his eighties), with a ready smile and a joke on his lips (which were usually wrapped around a cigar).

It is interesting to note that Rube was never in need; his father was wealthy and he, of course, made his own fortune. Like Toulouse-Lautrec, he drew for the love of it. Bob Dunn, ex-president of the National Cartoonists Society (which Goldberg had founded in 1945), summed it up in his eulogy to Rube: "He was the happiest man I ever knew."

The Smithsonian Institution had a memorial exhibition honoring Goldberg in 1970. What emotions he must have felt reviewing his past achievements when he heard the news of his death. He was without question the greatest cartoonist of his era.

One has to balance his judgment on Rube Goldberg. His earlier work, done prior to 1930, was simply sensational. Reading through Goldberg's first 25 years' output is a joy. One long laugh-smile-chuckle-guffaw of constant discovery. What comes after seems disappointing. We expect more from him...

Actually his work was adequate to the end. In comparison to his colleagues. But Goldberg was so great at the beginning that one expects higher standards from him. It's almost as if he were two different cartoonists.

Goldberg was a genuine comic genius, beyond a doubt. That he couldn't maintain his early pace is our loss, but it only proves that Rube was human, after all.

Considering his eccentric creations, Rube Goldberg lived a normal, even exemplary personal life.

He married a beautiful girl, Irma Seeman; he even asked her father, a wealthy wholesale grocer, for her hand in the traditional way. They had two bright children, Tom and George, both successful—Tom as an artist and George as a writer and producer. It was a till-death-do-us-part marriage.

Goldberg reported that he was shy as a child. As an adult he was convivial, belonging to many social and professional clubs. He was a superb after-dinner speaker.

For what it's worth, a caricaturist once told me that he could always tell an extrovert by his large ears. Rube had enormous, LBJ-sized ears.

Goldberg once wrote, "Shy, untalkative persons are usually the best observers," and he evidently observed well when he was small. He got background material for his social and political commentaries by watching the parade of house guests visiting his father, a San Francisco politician.

His father, Max, didn't care for Rube's ambition to become an artist; he insisted that his son study engineering at the University of California at Berkeley. What little art training Rube received came from a sign painter who had high artistic ideals but little success in the field.

After a short stint as a designer of sewers for the city of San Francisco, Rube quit to work as a sports cartoonist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1904. Shortly thereafter he switched to the *Bulletin*, and finally, with his father's reluctant best wishes, set out for New York to make his mark. In late 1906.

And make his mark he did! Within two years his cartoons were the talk of the city, and within three years, they were syndicated across America; by 1918 Bobb McNutt was widely syndicated by Hearst's Star Company. In 1921 the McNutt Syndicate was formed. In part in order to distribute Rube's cartoons. Between 1915 and 1930, he reportedly made one and a half million dollars.

Light and Shadow in the Police Court.
It Is Surprising There Are Any Movie Actors Left After Looking at the Films.

The movie producers seem to be afraid the public will lose interest if somebody doesn't die every two minutes.

The producer dies of heart failure at his desk.

Daughter takes poison in the woods.

Grandfather dies of old age, telling family he is an ex-con.</p>

Son goes out west and is killed when mine caves in.

Crying buckets on the backs of the goats would save the floor from getting slippery.

From the collection of Jim Ivey.

Circa 1910.

was interviewing cartoonists who came to San Francisco in the 1960s.

Rube was in town for the 60th reunion of his college graduating class ("At our 50th reunion in 1954, only 65 out of 500 were around to attend.") He was also there to formally donate the contents of three large crates to the Bancroft Library at Berkeley. These consisted of vast numbers of original cartoons and flies from his many years of cartooning.

As a sidelight to this, I was one of those approached to appraise his cartoon donations. The main appraiser was astounded at my total figure; I had figured $100 per original as a conservative figure. Today his cartoons bring very high prices.

"I decided to donate them, as your staff tends to get thrown out eventually—as you well know as a collector," Rube told me.

In 1962 the San Francisco Museum of Art exhibited a group of original cartoons—the first recognition by the museum. I was given to understand, of the art form—entitled "The Cartoon from Ollr's to Goldberg." Rube wrote the foreword. He did an excellent job of it (though I question that Mast ever worked on chalkplates):

When Jim Ivey invited me to contribute the foreword to the catalogue of his cartoon exhibit I welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. San Francisco and cartoons! My original home and my profession. As a boy on Valjeo Street my avid interest in cartooning led me to familiarise myself with the early names represented in this fine collection of originals. Jim Ivey has gathered from all parts of the world—Hogarth, Tenniel, Mast, Keppler, May, Daumier, Davenport, Kemble, and all the others.

The San Francisco Museum of Art displays courage and imagination in bringing these originals before Californians who are interested in the creative arts. There are those, unfamiliar with the great scope of cartooning, who believe that cartoonists are irresponsible zanies, accidentally gifted with the facility of putting scratchs on paper to amuse the children. They do not realize that it is a painstaking craft—a calling that requires a vast fund of knowledge acquired through concentration and experience. Cartoons are drawn not only to amuse but to bring visual understanding of human foibles and social injustices.

These original works of art—and I say works of art advisedly—are preserved as a nostalgic example of pictorial records of their time rather than pictures to be treasured for their material value. This I can not quite understand. I am puzzled to find that a Matisse done with a thick, heavy crayon on a large piece of wrapping paper is worth more than a Thomas Nast done with a masterful technique on a difficult chalk plate. Nor why a Picasso scratched on the back of a French menu during a heavy meal is worth more than a Tad Dorgan inspired by the drama of a great sports event. Perhaps easel painting is traditionally placed on a higher plane than drawing board creations.

But there are exceptions. Daumier is one cartoonist who has bridged the gap and found his way into expensive collections. May there be many more in the future—including some you see in this collection. Strangely enough, many of the abstract and the near-realistic painters of today are cartoonists whether they realize it or not.

An inspection of these works will show that no branch of cartooning is more important than another. The editorial cartoon, the comic strip, the story strip, the panel, the caricature—all require a keen sense of human values, and contribute their share of edification and amusement to the people of the world who, today, are harassed by crises over which they have no control."

Sports cartoons

Rube Goldberg got his first jobs in San Francisco in 1904 and in New York in 1906, as a sports cartoonist. He had 10 of his cartoons accepted for publication in his first month on the San Francisco Chronicle, and he drew his first series seven months later—James (for Jimmy Brett, a California boxer) and Jabez (for Jabez White, an English boxer) in Casaquilla—quite an accomplishment for a novice within his first year.
Goldberg's style was awkward at first, but signs of his mature style showed up in his cartoons during his San Francisco years. He started his writing career not long after starting his cartoon career, doing colorful sports stories that accompanied his cartoons in the Chronicle.

He left the Chronicle to replace TAD (Thomas A. Dorgan) on the Bulletin. TAD was headed for New York after being hired by William Randolph Hearst. Goldberg was replaced by an artist named Robert Brooks.

Rube Goldberg survived the San Francisco earthquake on April 18, 1906, and handled the misfortunes with lighthearted humor in his sports cartoon. "What most sportingmen are doing—living the simple life close to nature." Rube was showing real maturity.

Rube told me that Hearst had hired all the top San Francisco cartoon talent but himself, and, when he received no call, he decided to go to New York under his own steam. For a once-shy kid, he had developed a lot of moxie. He made it quite clear in our interview that his ego was hurt by his not getting a summons from Hearst. He felt he was as good as, if not better than, the others who had preceded him to fame in New York.

He went to New York, sure of his ability. In late 1906, after 12 unsuccessful job-hunting days, he reluctantly used a letter of introduction from the Bulletin's sports editor to the editor of the New York Mail. Once again, an editor turned him away.

But Goldberg persisted and talked the Mail's sports editor into giving him a trial. He proved himself and was hired at $50 a week.

He became the Mail's personality in a few years. Out-growing his sports cartoonist/writer spot.

Rube credited columnist Franklin P. Adams (F.R.A.) with giving him the idea for Foolish Questions, his first big hit series, which ran as space fillers in his sports cartoons for a few years at the Mail. They also ran as a color Sunday strip, syndicated in a small way by the McClure Syndicate (The Chicago Tribune) among other papers, carried them in 1909-10, and as a first book was a collection of Foolish Questions, published in 1909 by Small, Maynard.

In his sports cartoons, Goldberg was following Thomas A. [End of text]
Goldberg's Daily Cartoons

There is no typical daily Rube Goldberg cartoon from the 1910-34 period. These panels and strips centered on a dazzling variety of subject matter. Goldberg did repeat themes, but before anyone could tire of one there were half a dozen more.

These human-interest cartoons (Rube's phrase) sometimes were comment on current events, fads, or fashions; they often dealt with the human condition in general. Goldberg could sense the irony in things (the Inedt nomenclature of a forbidding "Welcome Inn"; the poor genius beside the wealthy boob); he could sniff out sham (snobs become glad-handers at election time; a couple sniffs at a neighbor's beard while embracing a hirsute foreigner). He loved to use funny elements—at least they turned out funny when Rube drew them: acrobats, aardvarks, DSC cans, English sheepdogs, gorgonzola cheese, improbably ridiculous statues, and floor lamps. But this doesn't begin to touch on Goldberg's variety; it was infinite. Day after day he worked his magic, always light, sometimes penetrating. His inspired production was impressive. Goldberg used a thin-line pen style—a "nervous line," some called it. He never over-drew; there was always a loose feeling about the art that added a breezy quality.

Paul Terry, a famous animator (Terrytoons) who had worked in San Francisco during Goldberg's early years, said: "He was born with that cock-eyed slant on the fitness of things... I used to watch him draw and always thought he had a cock-eyed way of holding the pen, but I could be wrong."

Goldberg seemed to lose interest in variety and human-interest subjects in the early 1930s. There was a definite loss of quality on some days; he was using weaker ideas and repeating old material. He decided to quit in 1934 and try a continuity strip. One feels that if he could have sustained it, he should have stuck to his daily variety strips, which were the very best things Goldberg did. They were his gems.

As Gilbert Seldes said in The Seven Lively Arts (1924):

"He is the most versatile of the lot (of prominent cartoonists); he has created characters, and scenes, and continuous episodes—foolish questions and meetings of ladies' clubs and inventions... and through them there has run a wild grotesque. The tortured statues of his decors are marvelous. The way he pushes stupidity and ugliness to their last possible point, and humor into everything, is amazing. Yet I feel he is manqué, because he has never found a perfect medium for his work.

"Your Friends Seem to Think Cigars Grow in Your Pocket," November 2, 1918.
The observation that Goldberg wasted his talents in later years has been shared with me by many comics scholars: he never really stuck to one thing.

**Panels-within-strips**

Rube Goldberg always provided both quality and quantity in his daily cartoons. On most days he added an extra panel to the cartoon, in effect giving two concepts for the price of one. Rubes first sensation was the Foolish Question panel that ran with his New York Mail sports cartoons. He added I'm The Guy later, and afterwards produced a bewildering flood of different sidebar panels.

In 1926-27 his cartoon was often composed of only three sidebar panels: called Cartoon Folies of 1926 (or 1927), he ran The Battling Browsns: Luke and His Like: and Famous Troublemakers.

In the 1920s and 1930s his extra panels were frequently reduced to the lower right-hand corner of the strip. He drew Baloney and Benny Sent Me in this fashion.

All of these sidelines were sparring additions to the main cartoons... which were usually brilliant all by themselves. Only when carried on for too long a time—Benny Sent Me in particular—did they loose their punch.

A list of these panels can be found at the end of this essay.

**Goldberg's Inventions**

"This crate is held together like some Rube Goldberg machine," said the cab driver on my way to my first interview with the owner of that name.

That was the lead to my story on Goldberg for the San Francisco Examiner in 1964. It illustrates the widespread use of his name. Much has been written on Goldberg's inventions, which have become synonymous with Goldberg: they got his name in the dictionary.

Rube Goldberg's forced education in engineering certainly gave him a jaundiced attitude toward machines. The first invention cartoon appeared in 1914, an automatic weight reducing machine; but there had been hints of them in his sports cartoons as early as 1908. The inventions appeared irregularly in his daily cartoons through 1934. He inserted them, awkwardly, into Lala Palooza in 1935-37. The Sunday Sideshow carried a Weekly invention from 1938-40. He did many advertising cartoons featuring them, along with commissions from Time and Reuseek for an occasional, specially drawn, invention. He even used them in his political cartoons. In the early 1950s Goldberg did one invention a week based on current events, syndicated by King Features. The inventions were great fun; the mixture of incongruous objects, people and animals was very imaginative, and the deadpan presentation added to the delight. But after reading a number of them, one is tempted to look at the pictures and skip the text.

What a "Rube Goldberg" is to an American a "Heath Robinson" is to an Englishman.

W. Heath Robinson, an English cartoonist and Punch magazine regular, drew zany inventions, not too dissimilar to Goldberg's. They appeared before World War I and were especially popular in the 1920s. It's possible that neither cartoonist knew of the other's work though volumes of Robinson's cartoons appeared in the United States.

Cornellius Veth in Comic Art In England (London. 1930) wrote of W. Heath Robinson: "As an inventor of impossible machines and absurd monuments, he certainly has a merit all his own..."
in specializing himself he has sometimes reached the highest pitch of absurdity. Next to the elaborate apparatus made to serve the most silly and impractical purposes—relating, I think, to that mixture of the scientific and the frivolous that makes up the now prevailing mental attitude—his monument to the inventor of the crossword puzzle is most admirable.... in such fantasies of his, every touch is comic.

Goldberg looked full credit for creating these inventions. He wrote a reprimand to the editor of the New York Times Magazine for allowing an artist there to use a crazy invention without credit to him.

His letter ran in the April 1st 1922 (only he wasn't April Fool's) edition of The Times Magazine. It read: 'As usual I feel flattered when someone appropriates my mechanical creations and is decent enough to give me credit. Not long ago Bill Mauldin called me up from St. Louis and asked if he could use one of my type inventions for a political cartoon. I was delighted to give him my okay. He gave me full credit. You ought to know better.—Rube Goldberg.' The Times Magazine thereupon gave him full credit and had artist Ray Doty draw a special invention showing Doty about to be guillotined and signed 'With apologies to Rube Goldberg.'

In any case, these inventions were not Rube's best creations. The daily cartoons of dazzling variety of the 1910s through the '20s were his best.


**Boob McNutt**

Goldberg started the Sunday strip Boob McNutt in 1915. It had a long run, ending in 1934. Hearst's Star Co. began syndicating the page in mid-1918.

The earliest episodes—up to 1920—began with Boob attempting to commit suicide in some looney fashion. He was always saved by someone, but in attempting to show his gratitude he proved so inept that the savior was happy to assist in putting him away in the last panel. This was delightful lunacy.

The story was complete in every Sunday strip until 1922, when Boob met Pearl. Pearl became his romantic quest; the balance of the strip's run was largely devoted to Boob's comic adventures in search of Pearl.

Boob was a good natured, ineffectual oaf. His intentions were always the very best: he was a Don Quichote type. The author has studied the subject of Cartoonists as Their Own Characters, based on clippings and comic strip reading. Frank Willard was somewhat like Moon Mullins, as was George McManus like his character, Jiggs. In Bringing Up Father. Goldberg didn't fit into this pattern, as none of his characters were anything like Golberg. The only common characteristic Rube had with Boob was that both were good natured.

After four years of wandering, Boob and Pearl were married in 1926. But Goldberg knew that Boob was not the subject for another domestic strip, so he immediately had them separate and the search was on once more.

When Boob located Pearl again in the Wild West in 1929, she had divorced him for desertion. A wedding ceremony in a plane (Boob had learned to fly) was interrupted by a crash and they were split once more. The formula eventually was thin. During a subplot in 1927, Boob was joined by Mike and Ike (with beak-whiskered twins, kinds of duplicate images of Jeff of Mutt & Jeff). Mike and Ike had been used in the daily strips and in sidebar panels in the 1910s; they added a nice touch in many Boob McNutt adventures almost to the end.

In the last two years of the strip Boob became wealthy. He lost his shaggy hair and uncoy ways... and all his character. Goldberg was obviously tired of Boob by then. The same change of character was seen in Loa Fatooza towards the end of that strip.

Goldberg's delightfully zany touch is found in the first 15 years of Boob—preposterous adventures: grotesque figures, fur...
niture, and fixtures; and names of characters, like Major Gumbo, Hard Rock Pete (both villains), Carmen Spumoni, Vacuum McHutt, Wart, Owl, and Malaria McHutt. His weird animals, more than human characters, showed evidence of Goldberg's imagination in the last four years of the strip. These were combinations of mammals, birds, fish and mechanical objects, with names such as Pootwoogle and Dinklewump. All represented good fun, and added to the result that Boob McNutt, overall, was a successful effort.

The strip carried a separate gag in the title panel until 1926 when Goldberg added top strips—first, Bertha, The Siberian Cheeseshed, changed in mid-year to Bill. Bill was a young man who was somewhat shiftless (the same character was used later by Goldberg in Sidewalk as Brad and Dadi, starring in rather a mild strip... at least compared to Boob McNutt at its best.

For 10 weeks—Jan. 28 to April 8, 1934—Goldberg changed the name to Bill and Prof. Butts, adding his wacky inventor, Prof. Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts. A.K. Evidently Goldberg saw the possibility of Butts as a substitute for the moribund Boob McNutt; if so, he didn't follow through.

In addition to Bill, Goldberg added an extra panel starting in 1933—Boob McNutt's Ark featuring impossible animals such as the Clotheopatian-headed Clop Clops. He later created Are You Saying Jokers?, featuring playing cards with movie star pasteches (example: Zazu McHutt, with Zazu Pitts as the inspiration); still later he created Boob McNutt's Geography (the shape of a state was shown and young readers were to guess the name of the state).

Gilbert Selides in The Seven Lively Arts cited Boob McNutt as being "the least worthy of Rube Goldberg's creations." This was written in 1924, before Doc Wright and Laia Falooza had seen light of day.

Bobo Baxter

From Rube to Boob to Bobo. In 1927-28 Goldberg produced a daily strip of amazing vitality and humor. Bobo Baxter concerned the crazy doings of half-pint Baxter, who travelled from scene to scene on his flying bicycle. The cycleplane, christened the Demi Tasse, inventions, frauds, intrigues, and nutty side-characters make Baxter a worthy rival to Moon Mullings and Barney Googie of the same era, but the strip was short-lived.

Perhaps Rube preferred the changing patterns of Human interest gags that claimed the spotlight in newspapers, or perhaps writing two simultaneous continuities (Boob McNutt was running Sundays at the time) was too much.

Doc Wright

Doc Wright was a mistake. Rube Goldberg himself indicated as much when he neglected to list the continuity strip in his last volume, Rube Goldberg vs. The Machine Age.

In the early 1930s, the adventure strip was gaining in popularity. Wash Tubbs, Tarzan, Buck Rogers, Tailspin Tommy, and similar strips had captured the public's attention. Goldberg made a stab at this type strip with a good-guy country physician, Doc Wright.

Goldberg's style was inappropriate to an adventure strip. For example, his heroines all looked like Pearl from Boob McNutt. Soap opera continuity was not Rube's forte.

Doc began on January 29, 1934 and died, unmourned, November 13 of the same year.

Al Capp wrote a proper epitaph in The Smithsonian, November, 1970: "The Doc was a Lincolnque character—selfless, heroic, kindly, philosophical; in short, a philosophizing bore. He reeked with the sanctimoniousness Goldberg had always ridiculed.

In Rube Goldberg vs. The Machine Age Rube wrote—and remember, he did not give a hint of Doc Wright in this book—"It looks as though we are headed straight toward a recrudescence of the tear. So strong is the later-day tendency to play up the heart-throb stuff: And... to reconstruct the comic strip into an out-and-out pathetic strip..." Goldberg did remember ole Doc Wright!

Rube's comment to me, when I mentioned that I recalled his Doc Wright strip, was, "Doc was serious—It was not me. I just didn't come off... And he wasn't anxious to discuss it any further.

Writing

Goldberg liked to call his low-production period his "writing period." This was from late 1934 until late 1936. Actually he
wrote more things before and after; he also published no books during this period. Rube Goldberg had written stories to go with his sports cartoons in his early San Francisco days, and he was proud of his writing. He was quoted as having the ambition to be "the H.G. Wells of this country."

In the long interview with him in 1964, he asked if I had ever tried to write, and without waiting for an answer, launched into his theory of writing: "Just write it as you would talk it."

(On the point of cartoonists writing, it shouldn't seem so unusual. Many cartoonists are competent writers. Herblock, political cartoonist of the Washington Post, has told of his trepidation when approached to do his first book—he felt he was an artist, not a writer. He was reminded that his captions were models of brevity in writing—not a wasted word, resulting in simplicity and clarity. Cartoonists make fine use of words; being limited by space restrictions and the short span of readers' attention, words are carefully chosen.)

—Goldberg had a way with words. Particularly delightful was his use of names: Prof. Lucifer Gorgonzola (he must have loved that cheese) Butts; Slugg O'Tool and Biff McThick, boxers; Hypo McGooch; Bicarbonate Lang; Anatole Zapp; Petrogrod Gaul; Orlando McCloud; Blodgett, Grous and Ipple; Attorneys; Willie Peanuts; Joab K. Silly; and, of course, Boob McNutt. (Keep in mind, Rube's "square" name was Heubon Lucius ...)

Goldberg, like other top cartoonists, added many words and phrases to our language: "Boloney," "Phoney Boloney," "I'm Cured," "Lalapalooza," "I'm the Guy," "They all come back for more," "They can have it." "What are you kicking about?" (some of these were probably not coined, but overheard, by Rube, but he made them popular). And, of course, he gave us "Rube Goldberg" as a term itself.

Rube was successful as a writer, appearing in many popular magazines, writing both fiction and non-fiction. The non-fiction was similar to his cartoon humor, and he illustrated almost all his writing with his cartoons. Of his 10 books, only three had extensive texts, the others being collections of cartoons.

The three books with considerable text are There A Doctor in the House, I Made My Bed, and Rube Goldberg vs. The Machine Age. These are listed in detail in the Bibliography at the end of this essay. Rube wrote some amusing forewords to most of his books (and for many others' books).

Lala Palooza

Goldberg returned to the cartoon field in late 1935 with Lala Palooza, handled by the newly formed Frank Jay Markay Syndicate. Markay had been with the McLaughlin Syndicate which had such great success with Rube's daily cartoons. Time magazine reported that Rube was pushed into creating Lala by an offer from the New York News-Chicago Tribune Syndicate to take over the late Sydney Smith's The Gumps. Many cartoonists were after this spot; considering it a rich prize, Rube was really an insult—surely he wasn't one to imitate another's efforts!

The only thing of note about Lala Palooza was the name. Only a sense of duty could force someone to read through a run of this strip. There are very few decent gags: a great repetition of situations (Vincent, Lala's brother, always falling asleep, for example) and heavy-handed use of slapstick. There is sparse use of Goldberg's trademarks, such as looney stationary and ridiculous names.

The cast was small: Lala; Vincent; Hives the Butler; Babette the maid; Aristotleo Sr. and Jr., cook and cook's helper; Pinto the dog. Prof. Van Gadget (he invented the Hydrocar that ran on water); Gonzales, a sulitor; and a few undistinguished villains.

From late 1937 on, Lala herself showed a great loss of weight after dieting at a farm. The character of Lala, like Boob McNutt, was changed toward the end of the strip. What little appeal Lala had before finally vanished. The strip died in 1938 after less than a two-year run.

A FANCY COAT COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS.

FABLES OF FRANKLIN D.

Above: An example of Goldberg's political cartoons. (October 5, 1940)

Toward the end—from late 1937—the daily strip interrupted the story one day a week to show one of Goldberg's inventions, presenting them as Vincent's creations. The Sunday masthead strip also carried Vincent with an invention, occasionally a Telephonies panel and, in the end, Rube Goldberg's Foolish Inventions as a top strip—a prelude to Sideshow, which he began in late 1938.

Goldberg's style showed great change from the early daily cartoons, Boob McNutt and Doc Wright, when Lala Palooza appeared. The thin lines became thick lines and much of the old Goldberg visual magic seemed to have been lost forever. He was, however, using assistants at the time and perhaps the inking of his pencil lines by others made a difference.

Regarding assistants, Goldberg wrote in the Famous Artists Cartoon Course text that they are "sometimes more of a hindrance than a help," he stated that he worked for over 20 years before getting an assistant. "Technically it's a help, but I like to do my own drawing... If the public is buying your work, make sure they get it."

Rube Goldberg's Sideshow

Slideshow (1938-40) used ingredients Rube had used years before. Brad and Dad used the lead character from Bill, the Boob
McNutt top strip, "Twisted Tales" was similar to daily strips of the 1920s and '30s—ironies of success, unexpected results. Goldberg used his "Weekly Invention" and sidebar panels "Blame It On Wilbur" and "Little Butch." As the feature continued he added a few new items: "Crackpot College;" "Nibsy," a strip; "Candid Cartoons;" "Boloney Book Of Etiquette;" and, again, "Foolish Questions.

There was little new here. Goldberg was just giving a watered-down hint of his best work done a decade and more earlier.

Advertising Cartoons

Rube drew large number of cartoons, especially his inventions, for advertising campaigns. He also created two characters for Pepsi-Cola, Pepsi & Pete, two chubby policemen who appeared in Sunday comic sections in the early 1940s.

Goldberg did quite a few cartoons for advertising campaigns, this one for Pepsi-Cola. (May 3, 1942)

Goldberg seemed to loosen up on these, and most of them have his old sparkle. They were more entertaining and amusing than Paipoza. Doc Wright or even the last year of Boob McNutt.

Pepsi & Pete, for example, showed the cops using suspenders for a slingshot, a ships helm for wheels, acrobats to form a human ladder, and convict's balls-and-chains to stop a locomotive. That's more imagination than is found in the entire run of Pala Paipoza.

Rube was a great cigar smoker, he was never seen without one. He thrust one at me—a superb cigar—at the start of our interview session. Cigars and Goldberg were synonymous. Goldberg wrote in the National Cartoonist Society album in 1965: "Waiting for Castro to fade out so I can get some good Havana cigars again," But in 1954 he louted Lucky Strike cigarettes in a four-color ad!

Rube was playing another joke on us.
Political Cartoons

It's surprising that Rube felt intimidated when he began his career as a political cartoonist for the New York Sun in 1938. He felt he was entering strange territory. Immediately after signing a contract, he went to an art supply store and asked what tools political cartoonists used, settling for the grease crayon, along with the old familiar pen, brush and ink.

Rube had drawn an occasional editorial cartoon in his early days at the New York Sun. These had a loose, zany touch—the approach that won him fame. Unfortunately he did not return to this approach on the Sun.

Evidently he felt he had to imitate what others were doing, but his best work was unique and original, not imitation.

It's unfortunate that he approached the field in such an attitude. Relatively few of his later political cartoons had any of the early sparkle. By all standards the one used when he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 was not one of his best.

When the Sun folded, Rube was hired by the Hearst Interests drawing three cartoons a week in his last years as a political cartoonist, syndicated by King Features Syndicate.

Rube was assisted by Warren King, later a political cartoonist on the New York Daily News, for his entire political cartooning stint.

Being a political cartoonist myself, I approach this aspect of Goldberg's career uneasily. The general consensus, I believe, is that Goldberg was not one of the great political cartoonists. Perhaps his good nature, his lack of any malice, explains it...
somewhat: it takes a bit of the "fire-in-the-belly," as the British
put it, to be a great one.

Goldberg once wrote: "Let me assure those good souls that I
take my political cartooning seriously, . . . I am still looking for
the return of the time when the political cartoon can swing an
election or send those who abuse the trust of the people to
a prolonged stretch on the rock pile. I still wonder how effective
the present-day editorial cartoon is . . . I regret to say I still
wonder whether the political cartoon is largely a decoration for
the editorial page . . ."

Harry Henderson, in an article in the January, 1951, issue
of Pageant, told of Rube's solution to a big problem he encoun-
tered while a political cartoonist. Like many others, he expected
Thomas E. Dewey to win the 1948 presidential race and had
drawn a cartoon to that effect. When Truman was the surprise
victor, Rube simply lettered the words "Rube Goldberg regrets"
in the frame of his cartoon. One of the more memorable
Goldberg political cartoons: Truman was delighted and
requested the original.

About Goldberg Thomas Craven wrote in Cartoon Cavalcade:
"For scores of years he incited millions to laughter, riproaring
laughter that pulled the middrift and made no sense. Then, for
no reason, he reversed his direction, lost his imagination, sank
lower and lower, and ended up a political cartoonist. Nothing
that he has accomplished, or will accomplish, in this field will
atone for his defection from the company of born comedians
who make life bearable in a world of pain." Rube Goldberg
believed however that his type of variety-cartoon had lived past
days when he quit doing them in 1934. He kept trying to find
something else to match their popularity.

The one and only time I saw Rube aroused was in the inter-
view in 1964. I came prepared: What was his reaction to Gerald
W. Johnson's comment about him in The Lines Are Drawn (a
book using Pulitzer Prize winning cartoons as a basis for

history): "But he is not a political cartoonist . . . ."

He had seen it . . . and was he upset! I calmed him a bit saying
that Johnson's total comments added up to generous
praise.

When Rube retired from cartooning the last of April, 1964,
he was already deep into his sculpting career.

Comic Sculpture

Rube's entry in Who's Who in America (1970-71 edition) begins:
"Reuben Lucas Goldberg, Sculptor: That's his own choice of
words: one fills out his own data sheet for Who's Who.

But sculpture was only another variation for Goldberg: Car-
toons in three dimensions. His son Tom, a serious (why fight
the term?) painter, got Rube interested in sculpture.

An alert, energetic 80-year-old, Rube needed something on
which to spend energies: he approached sculpting with
youthful enthusiasm. In our interview he spoke at length about
his upcoming first exhibit, trying to get me interested in try-
ing the art.

The quality of these small statues varied widely. A handful
were successful—some of the figures and groups and some of
the caricatures: some, on the other hand, were overly "cute." E
specialy delightful. Full of the old Goldberg spark of yore, was
the "group of toucan and the big-nosed people in the plastic
surgeon's waiting room.

"Another Daumier in sculpture." As some observers charac-
terized Goldberg, is rather impossible to accept, but his comic
statues add a nice finishing touch to a long career in comic art.

Goldberg noted about his sculpting: "This is my occupational
therapy. I'm the luckiest guy in the world—no deadlines, no
drain on my energies! This is an extension of what I've been
doing all my life. I laugh at them (his statues) myself!"
The National Cartoonists Society

There had been many attempts to form some kind of association of cartoonists before the National Cartoonists Society was formed in 1945, but they had all failed.

Cartoonists are not good organizational material. They work alone, for the most part, and many have healthy egos—a strong ego being necessary to see a cartoonist from the novice to the professional stage.

Rube Goldberg was the one man who had the stature, respect, and good humor needed to bring cartoonists together and to hold them. He was the group's first president, and the honorary president for the remainder of his life.

The Society's top award is called the "Reuben." After Goldberg, he designed the award statue. And he won the award himself in 1967 for comic sculpture.

Bob Dunn, in an NCS eulogy to Goldberg in 1971, said, "He treated the NCS like his family. He guided. He held us together. He was a gentle giant. We are all better for knowing him."

Conclusion: No Matter How You Slice It . . .

Rube Goldberg had a tremendous influence on the American conscience. He made us aware that machines and gadgets do not bring Utopia. He added bouncy words and phrases to our language, including his own name. He influenced—and continues to influence—countless numbers of cartoonists. But mainly, he made us laugh.

Most cartoonists are just trying to entertain, no matter what field they are working in. Political cartoonists may have an axe to grind, but they'd damn well better be entertaining about it!!

Rube was no different.

All the attempts to psychoanalyze Rube's intentions—bringing in Freud and all the agonizing tries at defining humor—are just so many wasted words.

Rube wrote in the National Cartoonists Society's Reuben Award booklet in 1961: "If you have been influenced by Freud you might say the Reuben represents four cartoonists who hated their mothers for allowing them to become cartoonists, and are groping for an acrobatic answer to the question of why sculptors and pretzel makers have so much in common. Or you might say the Reuben represents the people of the world trying for perfect balance to escape the same fate as the leaning tower of Pisa. You'd be wrong on both counts.

"The Reuben is sheer fantasy..."

In his last speech, read by his sons at the Smithsonian exhibit of his works in November, 1970, Rube wrote: "I have heard cartoonists and writers try to explain the essence of their humor—how they work and why something is funny. I believe that a humorist is born with his own peculiar sense of humor and charisma. After learning the few techniques of putting his ideas down on paper or canvas, he just goes ahead and does it. Later, in defense of his fame or success, he tries to tell the young aspirants how he does it. But it is all hindsight. In the beginning, he really didn't know himself."

The Rube Goldberg I knew would have one comment for all the high-blown attempts at analysis:

"BOLOMEY!"

Rube Goldberg was unique. He was THE classic American cartoonist.
The Works of Rube Goldberg


Human Interest daily cartoons: (N.Y. Evening Mail, and syndicated, McNaught, 1910-1934). History in a Modern Picture Frame: Inventions (also 1951-54, 1960-64); Father Was Right: Boobs Abroad; I Never Thought of That; I'm Cured; Mike & Ike, They Look Alike (also used as a sidebar panel); Life's Little Jokes: Weekly Meeting of the Tuesday Women's Club; Our Own Radio Raunings; But It Doesn't Mean Anything; They All Look Good When You're Far Away; They All Come Back For More; Au, Give a Guy a Chance; That's Right, You're Wrong; Soup and Fish, the Saturday Night Sheiks; It's Wrong... All Wrong; Mother was Right; ...Sweep Out the Padded Cell...; Cartoon Follies of 1926-7; Bozo Butts—They Drive Him Nuts: People Who Put You to Sleep: A Sad, Sad Story: Where Have I Heard That Stuff Before: It's Different When It Happens To You; Public Enemy... Why Is It?... So He Took It Out On His Wife: They Always Go You One Better: Goldberg's Boobs; But That's Different: They Can Have It; But It Doesn't Mean Anything: Life's Follies (overall title used in 1920s).

Panels within comic strips (1908-1940) (These ran in the sports cartoons. In the daily strips until 1934: also in Bob McNutt (B); Lala Palooza (L); Sideshow (S). Foolish Questions: I'm The Guy; 50-50; Phoney Films; Slackers; Steve Himself; Captain Johnny; Phoney Boonies; Bob News: Divide by Two and You're Nearer Right; Battling Brown; Blind Boobs; Chamber of Horrors; Luke & His Uke; Famous Trouble Makers; Alphabet Soup; Mr. All of the Alphabet; Sabagrams; He Don't Know From Nothing; Telephonies; Boloney: Benny Sent Me: Bob McNutt's Ark (B); Bob McNutt's Geography (B); Are You Saving Jokers? (B); Telephonies (again in L); Rube Goldberg's Invention (L); Weekly Invention (S); Twisted Tales (S); Candid Cartoons (S); Crackpot College (S); Brain Derby (S); Foolish Questions (again in S); Boloney Book of Behavior also Etiquette (S).

Song lyrics: I'm the Guy, 1912; Music in the Zoo, 1946.

Animated cartoons: 1916-1918: Various titles based on his newspaper features.


Sunday pages: The Look-a-Like Boys, 1907: Don't Some People Ask the Biggest Fool Questions?, 1909-10; What Are You Kicking About!, 1909 (all World Color Printing Co.); Bobo McNutt, 1915-18 (New York Evening Mail), 1918-34 (Star Co. And King Features Syndicate) (with top strips Bertha the Siberian Cheesehound, 1924; Bill, 1924-34; Bill and Prof. Butts, 1934); Lala Palooza, 1936-38 (Frank Jay Markey Syndicate); Sideshow, 1938-40 (Register and Tribune Syndicate) (with top strip Brad and Dad).

Play: Day of Rest.

Screenplay: Soup to Nuts!


Efficient Way to Tie a Knot in String

Wintry wind (A) turns pinwheel (B) which revolves pulleys (C) and turns on heat in radiator (E). Cat (C) is startled and jumps on cake of ice (F) which causes knife (G) to cut bologna (H) in half. Piece of bologna falls off platform (I), causing string (J) to open case (K) and let out mosquito (L) which bites Uncle Rupus' (M) neck. He lifts head in pain and hits die (N) which causes walking-bag (O) to move and press finger on wooden hand (P) against knot (Q) allowing you to tie string "tightly." Don't waste too much time on this because no matter where or how you accidentally package it will be smashed when it gets there, anyway.

Device for Closing the Window in Case of Rain

The professor takes a pill and dozes out device for closing the window if it starts to rain while you're away. Pet bull frog (A) is sick for water, hears rain storm and jumps for joy. Pulling string (B) which opens catch (C) and releases hot water bag (D) allowing it to slide under window seal. Heat raises yeast (E) which causes hook (F) to release spring (H) and automobile-bumper (G). Socks monkey (K) in the neck pulling him down for the count on table (L). He staggers to his feet and slips on banana peel (H). He instinctively reaches for flying rings (N) to avoid further disaster and his weight pulls rope (O). Closing window (L), stopping the rain from leaking through on the family downstairs and thinning their soup.
Get One of Our Patent Fans and Keep Cool

Take hold of handles (A) of wheelbarrow (B) and start walking-pulley (C) turning kicking arrangement (D) which annoys bear (E). Bear suspects doll (F) and eats it, pulling string (G) which starts mechanical bird (H) saying, "Do you love me?". Love-bird (I) keeps shaking head "yes", causing fan (J) to move back and forth making nice breeze blow right in your face.

A Modest Mosquito-Bite Scratcher

Water from drain-pipe (A) drops into flask (B). Cork (C) rises with water carrying needle (D) with it. Needle punctures paper tumblers (E) containing beer (F). Beer sprinkles over bluebird (G) and he becomes intoxicated and falls on spring (H), which bounces him to platform (I). He pulls string (C) thinking it is a worm. String fires off cannon (K), which frightens peace-hound (L), causing him to jump in air, landing on back in position (M). His heavy breathing raises disk (N), which is brought back into its original position by weight (O). The continual breathing of the dog moves scraper (P) up and down over mosquito bite, causing no embarrassment while talking to a lady.
Sending a Late Stayer Home

Man in restaurant mistakes professor butts for a herring, sprinkles pepper on him and he sneezes up an idea for sending a late-stayer home.

At 1 a.m. door of cuckoo clock (A) opens, causing string (B) to pull trigger of gun (C) and shoot cuckoo (D) which falls on board (E), weight of cuckoo throws knife (F) against sandbag (G), cutting hole (H) in bag allowing sand (I) to run down on scale (J). Cord (K) closes shears (L) which cut string (M) allowing mask (N) to descend over victim's head (O). Lodge goat (P) thinking that late-stayer is being initiated butts him out into the street.

Don't worry about his hat and coat as he will not need them in the hospital.