

Helen Rubin – Radio Singer

by Neal R. Simpson



On page 20 of the 9 June 1931 edition of *The Syracuse Journal*, a photograph of smiling bride Helen Rowland and dashing groom Larry Daniels was published with the caption of “RADIO ROMANCE.” Unknown to the newspaper reading public, both bride and groom were using pseudonyms instead of their real names! Now after 80+ years the story can be told of their true identities.

Helen Hannah Rubin was born 22 September 1908 at 1991 Washington Ave. in the Bronx, New York.¹ Her parents were Russian born Joseph Rubin, a lawyer, and Sadye Barveld, born in New York of Russian immigrants.²

Helen attended George Washington High School and at about the age of 15 left school to pursue a career in entertainment.³ During 1924, she most likely attended Ned Wayburn’s Studios of Stage Dancing in New York City before appearing in a few of the Wayburn vaudeville productions that were specifically cast with students from his school.⁴

By June 1925 she was appearing in Ned Wayburn’s production of “Girlies Gambol / Dancin’ Darlings” at the Hotel Shelburne in Brighton Beach, New York.⁵ She was noted in *Variety* as being “... a sort of cabaret Ann Pennington...” (Anne Pennington was the dancer famous for promoting the dance called the Black Bottom) and that she “... looms up little beyond the others in the cast.”⁶ A review of the show in the *Brooklyn Standard Union* stated that “Helen Rubin is also another singer who ought to have no difficulty in passing into the ranks of professionals.”⁷ In February 1926, Helen was now part of the cast of Wayburn’s road production of “Maiden Voyage” (originally previewed as “Honeymoon Cruise”).⁸ She toured with Ned Wayburn’s

vaudeville road productions until at least the end of November 1926.⁹

Also in the cast of “Maiden Voyage” was a 15-year-old actress from Ohio named Muriel Malone.^{10,11} Muriel was already a vaudeville dance veteran, having been a member of the Capitol Theatre dance troupe during 1925.^{12,13} Muriel eventually left “Maiden Voyage” and toured in the 1926 Rufus LeMaire production of “Le Maire’s Affairs” that starred Sophie Tucker and Ted Lewis.¹⁴

Sometime at the beginning of 1927, Helen and Muriel created the vaudeville team “Rubin and Malone.”¹⁵ The act that they developed was titled “What Do Men Prefer?”¹⁶ According to *Vaudeville Notes* in the 25 June 1927 edition of *Billboard*, the tour began at the Tilyou Theater on Coney Island and “The act was conceived and staged by Will Roehm of the Roehm & Richards outfit. Lyrics were written by Joe Brandfon and Willie White supplied the music.”¹⁷ Helen did most of the singing.¹⁸ Muriel did most of the dancing.¹⁹ A review of this “sister” act in the 20 Dec 1927 edition of the *Morning Oregonian* had this to say: “Helen and Muriel feature their number with an interpretation of the American girl from colonial times to “black bottom” times. Strange, but as the years go by clothes come off according to these two young ladies.”²⁰

This review from the 20 July 1927 edition of *Variety* seems to sum up the excitement generated by their performance:

GRAND CONCERT
Sunday, February 9th
HELD AT
NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL
AT 1 O'CLOCK

CANTOR
JOSEPH ROSENBLATT
and
Associate Artists
— Also —
HELEN RUBIN,
Well Known Radio Artist
RUBEN GOLDBERG,
Toastmaster of the Evening
RABBI MEYERS, of
the Flushing Free Synagogue
Will Speak
Mr. Cornelius Valentine will
Render an Organ Recital
— Also —
Dave Stone & His Rockaway Band
Proceeds for the Religious School of The Hebrew
Tickets may be obtained at 136 Tory St., Corona Heights

Scranton, Pennsylvania, they shared the theatre bill with an up-and-coming young comedian – Milton Berle !²⁵

By the summer of 1928, the act of Rubin and Malone and “What Do Men Prefer?” seems to have run its course and Helen and Muriel had gone their separate ways. During the latter half of 1928, Helen may have been a vocalist with Ben Bernie.²⁶

In January 1930, Helen Rubin began appearing as part of the ensemble of the Littmann Clothing Store radio shows on WABC New York.²⁷ (This is not the modern incarnation of radio station WABC, New York, but the predecessor to the present-day WCBS and the Columbia Broadcasting System.) Also in the ensemble were tenor Byron Holiday and contralto crooner of the blues, Helen Richards.²⁸

At the beginning of 1930, Helen Rubin was doing 14 radio programs a week for Littmann’s.²⁹ Apparently feeling comfortable in her role as radio singer, she was billed as a “Well Known Radio Artist” in an advertisement for a concert she performed in at the Newtown High School in Queens, New York on 9 February.³⁰

In March 1930, Helen Rubin was interviewed by reporter Elma Sioux Scarberry.³¹ This interview with photograph was published in a few newspapers around the country. Besides a few scant facts concerning her early life and career, Helen talks about her fiancé, “Larry what’s- his- name” : “He is a real estate salesman and learned a good fast line in Florida during the boom.”³² His last name is not mentioned “...because he insists nobody knows him anyway and he doesn’t like publicity.”³³ The wedding is planned for September 1930.³⁴

In June 1930 “Miss Helen Rubin, radio artist...” was entertainment at a dinner given in honor of the betrothal of Norma Druss, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. D Druss of Jackson Heights, New York to David Stone.³⁵ Among the guests listed were Helen’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rubin and Norma’s brother, Larry Druss.³⁶ Louis / Lawrence Druss (Daniels) was born about 1904 in New York.³⁷ He was probably involved in real estate³⁸ and possibly the music publishing business³⁹ and radio in the New York City area.⁴⁰ (NOTE: There does not seem to be any connection to a NYC area comedian from the late 1940s - 1950s named Larry Daniels).



“Come Rubin and Malone, two little girls, with something to show. They are pretty. One is a blonde, the other a brunette. Which, they asked the audience, do men prefer - blonde or brunette? They will exhibit their wares and find out.

The brunette sings a song - a ballad. Her voice is not excellent, her endeavor is sincere and she is rewarded with whistles and shouts. Somewhere from way up in the right portion of the gallery comes an enthusiastic noise made by placing the tongue between the lips and blowing heartily but it is overlooked. The blonde appears. She is heavily clothed and she starts a dance. Soon she removes some of the clothes and does a different dance. Again. And again. She is very lightly clothed now, and there are exclamations of delight. The figure of a goddess! She breaks into a hot dance, and the figure that was of a goddess shivers and gyrates itself into stark reality. There are shrill whistles of approval that almost split the eardrums. There are yells of encouragement.

“Shake that thing!”

Then the dancing is completed and there is little song to be sung. But the customers don’t want it and they protest.

“Go back into your dance!”

“Come on, baby - shake!”

She won’t shake. She’s through with that. She wants to sing. The big bums –why won’t they let her sing?

Magic!”²¹

They toured the vaudeville circuit across the country with this act to good reviews, stopping in places as varied as Seattle, Washington,²² Ogden, Utah²³ and San Diego, California.²⁴ In





Helen Rubin was using the pseudonym "Helen Rowland" when her first known recordings are made in September 1930 with Sam Lanin and his Orchestra in New York City.⁴¹ This must have caused some confusion as Helen Rowland was also the name of a popular syndicated newspaper columnist and author!⁴² To further baffle future music researchers, there was also a child actor named Helen Rowland (born 1919) who appeared in a few silent films in the 1920's.⁴³ In December, Helen Rowland (nee Rubin) performed on the Maxwell House Ensemble program on the NBC network.⁴⁴ She sang *Moanin' Low*.⁴⁵

March 1931 had Helen appearing in a special All-Gershwin show on NBC's Maxwell House - General Foods Ensemble program.⁴⁶ The show included the Maxwell House Orchestra under the direction of Don Voorhees, the Maxwell House Quartet, tenor Frank Parker, and concert pianist Arthur Schutt.⁴⁷ Songs featuring Helen were: *The Man I Love* with Arthur Schutt on piano and *Someone to Watch Over Me* with the ensemble.⁴⁸

Helen scored another coup in April 1931 when she was a guest vocalist on NBC's Fleischmann Yeast Hour with Rudy Valle and his Connecticut Yankees.⁴⁹ Described in the *San Antonio Express* as "Winsome Helen Rowland, musical comedy protégé of Ned Wayburn and popular radio songstress...",⁵⁰ a listing from the *Chicago Tribune* also for the broadcast then states: "During her stage and radio career Miss Rowland has won a name for herself in the role of blues singer. She will be heard singing three new tunes, *Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone*, *By My Side*, and *If You Should Ever Need Me*."⁵¹

On 3 June 1931, Lawrence Druss and Helen Rubin were married by Rabbi Israel Goldstein in New York City at the Hotel Savoy Plaza.⁵² On the marriage certificate, Larry's occupation was entered as "Radio Recording Rep" and Helen's occupation was entered as "Radio Recording Artist."⁵³ Witnesses to the marriage were bandleader/violinist, Nathan "Nat" Brusiloff and Yiddish comedian, Henry Burbig.⁵⁴ Six days later the "RADIO ROMANCE" marriage photograph of Helen Rowland and Larry Daniels is printed in various newspapers.⁵⁵

Helen continued to use the "Rowland" surname on the radio.⁵⁶ She may have been a vocalist for Phil Spitalny and his orchestra

on WABC / Columbia Broadcasting during the first half of 1932.⁵⁷ She appeared in few radio listings that year. This was possibly due to her being pregnant with her first child. A September 1932 birth announcement in the *New York Times* has "Mr. and Mrs. Larry Daniels (nee Helen Rubin), daughter, Jill, on Thursday, Sept. 8 at Women's Hospital."⁵⁸ Another birth announcement in *Variety* lists her as "Mrs. Larry Daniels... (Helen Rowland)" and that her agency is Sound Studios, Inc.⁵⁹

Helen Rowland's name starts coming to light again in the published radio listings for February 1933.⁶⁰ About May of that year she made the switch to Larry's pseudonym last name of "Daniels."⁶¹ Billed as "The Girl With the Mellow Voice," she added a little flair by adding an "e" to the end of her first name, becoming Helene Daniels.^{62,63} A review of the Norman Brokenshire WOR radio program in the 12 June 1934 issue of *Variety* states that "Helen[e] Daniels who formerly billed herself as Helen Rowland, has the regular vocal assignment in the Brokenshire stock company. Hers is a soprano and style that does richly by a heart lyric."⁶⁴

With the election of President Roosevelt in November 1932 and the pending repeal of Prohibition, beer is again allowed to be brewed legally in the United States. One such brewery was the Kings Beer brewery in Brooklyn, New York. In the spring of 1933, the Kings Beer All-Star program on WOR was popular Tuesday night entertainment.⁶⁵ Helene Daniels appeared on the program, along with a young announcer named Joe Bolton, later well-known as "Officer Joe Bolton," host of New York City area children's television and Three Stooges fame.⁶⁶ This show was short-lived however, when in July, Kings Beer moved its programming to WABC.⁶⁷ With the official repeal of the 18th Amendment on 5 December 1933, Helen was hired along with Barney Rapp and his orchestra to play a special "Repeal of the 18th Amendment" show at the well-known gambling casino, Club Forest in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana just outside of New Orleans.⁶⁸ A 15 May 1934 *Variety* review of one of her club performances gives a sense of what her stage presence was like at this point of her career:

CLUB FOREST

TONIGHT

PRESENTS ENTIRE

NEW FLOOR SHOW

featuring

BARNEY RAPP

*and His Nationally Famous
Radio Orchestra*

PEPINO & NAIDA <small>America's Grandest Ballroom Dancers —Recently with Guy Lombardo's Band</small>	HELEN DANIELS <small>Broadway's New Ruth Etting, Whom You've Heard on Many National Radio Programs</small>
GEORGE M'QUEEN <small>America's Ace Master of Ceremonies</small>	RUTH LAIRD GIRLS <small>An Octet of Beauty and Grace</small>

REPEAL OF THE 18th AMENDMENT

In keeping with the usual Club Forest policies, we have equipped a most luxurious bar; we have acquired the services of some of the oldest bartenders available, mixing only the best in drinks.

"Working behind a mike with differently tinted pin-spots for each of her six songs, Miss Daniels easily held the audience here through sheer quality of voice. Mellow, smooth timbre of the latter is perfectly adaptable to the ballads she sings. Her general delivery is far above the average of the usual run of ether performers..."⁶⁹

Songs in her 1934-1935 club repertoire included: *Love Thy Neighbor*, *Wagonwheels*, *This Little Piggie Went to Market*, *Stay As Sweet as You Are*, *Stars Fell on Alabama*, *Hands Across the Table*, *The Object of My Affection* and *Blue Moon*.^{70, 71} On one occasion, Paramount musical director (and future Soviet counterspy!) Boris Morros⁷² was so impressed with her abilities, that he booked her for an engagement at the New York Paramount Theatre as part of the live entertainment that played in between movie performances.^{73,74}

In June 1935, the "Radio Gossip" column in the *Jewish Chronicle*, has Helen Daniels along with Nat Brusiloff listed "... as one of many of the big stars heard over station WOR [who] are Jewish."⁷⁵ By June 1936 she is featured on Mutual's "Jazz Nocturne" program with Nat Brusiloff's Orchestra.⁷⁶ July 1937 has her photograph appear in the *Los Angeles Times* with the caption: "... torch singer par excellence..."⁷⁷

Mutual Broadcasting seemed to have been trying to groom Helen for even better things at the beginning of 1938. A small article in *Radio Mirror* magazine stated that "... in a desperate effort to put blues-singing Helene Daniels across, her managers and the Mutual network are securing a dramatic teacher, fencing instructor, and beauty expert to improve the Daniels finesse."⁷⁸ May 1938 had Helene Daniels and another Mutual Broadcasting vocalist, Joan Merrill posing in an eight picture two-page "cheesecake" photo spread in *Radio Stars* magazine.⁷⁹ One of the photographs in the spread will be cropped and used by Helene for a personal advertisement in the *Radio Annual* of 1939.⁸⁰

From 1931 as "Helen Rowland" to about 1943-1944 as "Helene Daniels," Helen Rubin was a regular on many programs on WOR and the Mutual Broadcasting System. Besides "Jazz Nocturne," some of them include: "Sunday in Manhattan," "Remember?," "Hi There, Audience," the Morton Gould Orchestra show and various other musical variety programs.⁸¹ There are three shows that this author would love to hear a copy of, if they exist: Two were broadcasts of WOR's "Cats and Jammers" program featuring pianist Erskine Butterfield. On the 3 Aug 1941 broadcast, Erskine's guest was Helene Daniels.⁸² On the 17 Aug 1941 broadcast, the guests were Helene Daniels and the gospel/pop vocal group, The Charioteers!⁸³ The third was Helene being interviewed on 8 Nov 1938 by the "Lowell Thomas of New Jersey," C.J. Ingram,⁸⁴ on his WOR "Of Mutual Interest" program.⁸⁵ Who knows what insights into the career of Helen Rubin could have been gleaned from this fifteen minute broadcast!

During World War II, Helen donated her time through the American Theatre Wing to entertain the troops.⁸⁶ She married one of them in July 1944, Staff Sgt. Charles M. Arak USAAF (born 1904) of New York City (she was divorced from Larry Druss / "Daniels" in March 1939).⁸⁷ Recorded on the marriage certificate as "Helen Druss", her occupation is entered as "none".⁸⁸ The witnesses to the marriage were Jack and Doris Gribin.⁸⁹ Jack Gribin was involved with the NYC fur trade.⁹⁰ His wife Doris⁹¹, a songwriter, started her music career as Irving Berlin's secretary!⁹² Known professionally using her maiden name Doris Tauber, she was well known for co-writing the song *Them There Eyes* with Maceo Pinkard and William Tracey.⁹³



On 30 October 1943, Helen and Doris were both performers at the same event, a Halloween dance commemorating the first anniversary of the Arthur G. Blair shipyard located in Yonkers, NY.⁹⁴

In 1946, Helen gave birth to a son.⁹⁵ She seems to have drifted away from the entertainment business and starting in 1948 became a bookstore executive associated with the bookseller George Meyerson, Inc. and also the Womrath Book Shops in New York City.⁹⁶ From 1968-1972 she was contracted to organize children's book fairs for schools in the New York area.⁹⁷ She passed away on 15 October 1992.⁹⁸ Her husband Charles, who became an estate lawyer in New York, passed away not long after on 1 November 1992.⁹⁹

And what became of Muriel Malone? In 1936 she married colorful carnival barker and "Hollywood Midget" entrepreneur Nate Eagle.^{100,101} Nate's claim-to-fame included managing the infamous Zoro Garden Nudist Colony at the 1935-1936 Pacific International Exposition in San Diego¹⁰² and the "Nate Eagle's Hollywood Midgets" carnival sideshow act.¹⁰³ Muriel appears to have been responsible for the acting, music and choreography for the sideshow!¹⁰⁴ A very interesting two part article about Nate and Muriel and their exploits appeared in the 19 April and 26 April, 1958 issues of *The New Yorker* magazine.^{105,106} She passed away in Greenville, South Carolina in April 1980.¹⁰⁷

Known Recording Sessions (Compiled from the books *The American Dance Band Discography : 1917-1942* and *Moanin' Low*.)

As Helen Rubin: none known.

As Helen Rowland:

- September 1930 to May 1933, all in New York:
 - Sam Lanin and His Orchestra.
 - Benny Goodman and His Orchestra.
 - Ben Selvin and His Orchestra.
 - Brunswick Hour Orchestra.

- Ralph Bennett and His Seven Aces.
- Helen Rowland & Paul Small – with orchestra.
- Victor Young and the Brunswick Orchestra.
- Ted Weems and His Orchestra.
- Majestic Dance Orchestra.
- Phil Spitalny and His Orchestra.
- Erno Rapee's Orchestra
- Abe Lyman and His Orchestra.
- Frankie Trumbauer and His Orchestra.
- Philip Spitalny's Music.
- Ed Lloyd and His Band.

As Helene Daniels:

- 8 September 1933 - NY - Ben Selvin and His Orchestra.
- ? May 1937 - NY - Nat Brusiloff and His Orchestra.
- 5 June 1939 - NY - Ben Bernie and His Orchestra.

Film Appearances:

Helen Rubin may have appeared and sang as Helen Rowland in an 8-minute 1932-1933 musical comedy short film featuring songwriter Benny Davis.¹⁰⁸ According to a short review in *Variety*:

*"Setting is a courtroom, Davis on the stand charged with writing songs. Various witnesses called to testify by singing his better-known numbers, Davis doing several himself."*¹⁰⁹

Members of the cast included Jackie Green, Martha Ray, the Stewart Sisters, Charlie Carlisle and Helen Rowland.¹¹⁰ These short films were part of the Melody Makers series produced by the Master Art Products, Inc. of New York City.¹¹¹

(Note: The book *Moanin' Low* attributes five songs in the 1927 Vitaphone #2348 short film *Stories in Song* to Helen Rowland. This is incorrect. Adele Rowland, a popular vocalist from the 1900s-1910s appears and sings in the film.)¹¹²

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