

Willard Lewis Waterman born August 29, 1914, Madison, Wisconsin died February 2, 1995, Burlingame, California was a character actor in films, TV and on radio, remembered best for succeeding Harold Peary as the title character of *The Great Gildersleeve* at the height of that show's popularity.

When Harold Peary was unable to convince 'The Great Gildersleeve' sponsor and show owner Kraft Cheese to allow him an ownership stake in the show he decided to move from NBC to CBS. Kraft, however, refused to move the show to CBS and hired Waterman to replace Peary as the stentorian Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve.

Waterman attended the University of Wisconsin in the mid-1930s, where he joined Theta Chi, acted in student plays, and was a friend of Uta Hagen. He also began his radio career in Madison, and came to NBC in Chicago in early 1936. There he met and replaced Peary on *The Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters*; the two men become longtime friends. He took over the role of Gildersleeve in episode 370, broadcast on Sept 6, 1950 and stayed to 1957 on radio and in an ill-fated television version syndicated in 1955. For the most part the transition from Peary to Waterman on the radio was seamless, though Waterman refused to appropriate the half-leering, half-embarrassed laugh Peary had made a Gildersleeve trademark;

At the same time he was heard as Gildersleeve, Waterman had a recurring role as Mr. Merriweather in the short-lived but respected radio comedy vehicle for Ronald Colman and his wife Benita Hume, *The Halls of Ivy*. Waterman's pre-Gildersleeve radio career, in addition to Tom Mix, had included at least one starring vehicle, a short-lived situation comedy, 'Those Websters', that premiered in 1945. He also had radio roles between the mid-1930s and 1950 on such shows as *Chicago Theater of the Air* (variety) and *Harold Teen* (comedy), plus four soap operas: *Girl Alone*,^[3] *The Guiding Light*, *Lonely Women*,^[4] *The Road of Life* and *Kay Fairchild*, *Stepmother*. He is also remembered for his role as Claude Upson in the 1958 film *Auntie Mame*.

During World War II, Waterman worked in war production in the Nash-Kelvinator plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and resided at 405 65th Street.

In 1964 he toured with a road production of *How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying* in the role of Jasper B. Biggley with Dick Kallman in the lead as J. Pierpont Finch.

He was awarded a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for Radio at 1601 Vine Street in Hollywood, California.

