

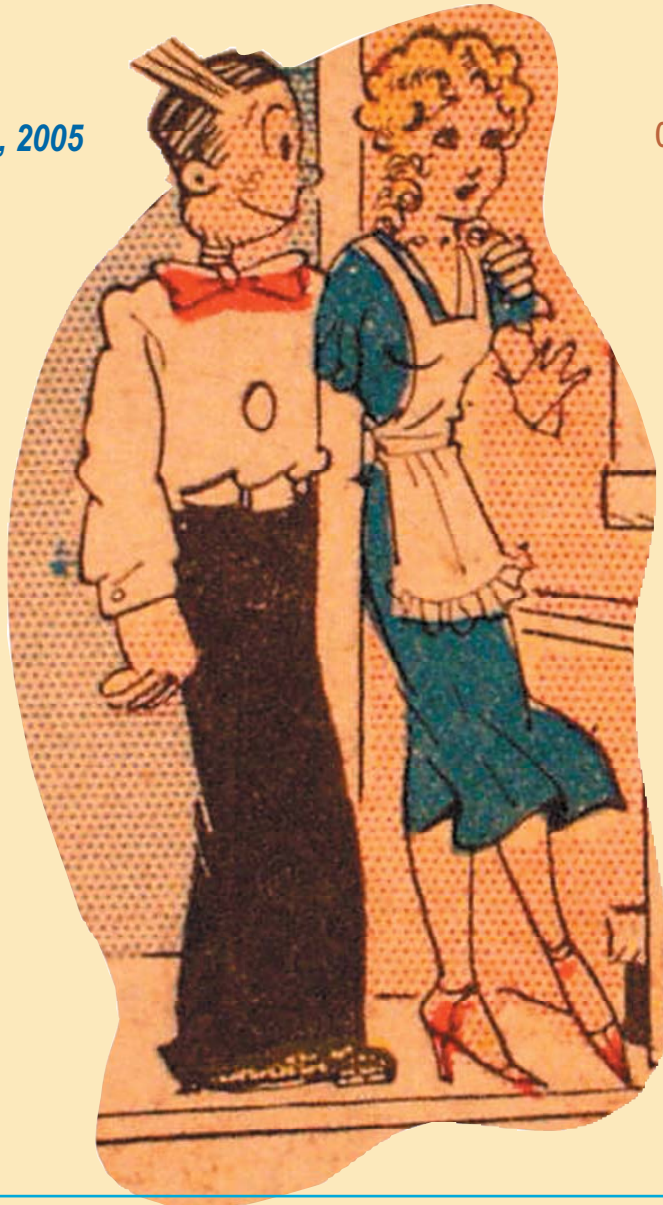


UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

Special Collections presents

75 YEARS OF
BLONDIE
1930 - 2005

October 1 – October 31, 2005



On Display in the Exhibit Gallery
Second Floor
Smathers Library (East)
George A. Smathers Libraries
University of Florida



The Early Years

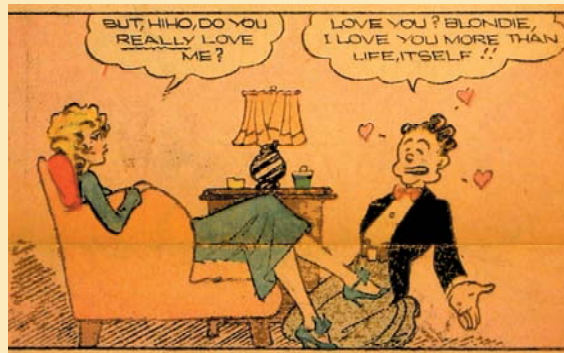
ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2005, THE COMIC STRIP *Blondie* celebrated its 75th anniversary. Created by Murat Bernard “Chic” Young (1901-1973), *Blondie* is one of the longest running newspaper strips. Young produced *Blondie* seven days a week until his death, at which time his son, Dean Young, assumed creative control of the comic strip.

This exhibit commemorates *Blondie*’s anniversary by exploring its early history. Few realize or remember that *Blondie*’s origins are in the genre of flapper strips that were popular in the twenties and thirties. Prior to *Blondie*, Chic Young produced other strips in this style with titles such as *Dumb Dora*, *Beautiful Babs* and *The Affairs of Jane*.

Blondie was not always Mrs. Bumstead, mother of two with a dog named Daisy. Blondie Boopadoop was a single girl from a working class background. She exemplified the “dumb blonde” stereotype and her strategically deployed ditziness initially provided much of the strip’s humor.

Although the comic strip is seventy-five years old, *Blondie* and *Dagwood* have only been married for seventy-three of those years. *Blondie* had many suitors, but her early leading man was *Hiho*. *Hiho Hennepin* was a shorter prototype of *Dagwood*

right down to the trademark bow tie they both sport. Young fazed out *Hiho* shortly after *Blondie*’s marriage to his taller and richer rival.



Above: *Hiho* courted *Blondie* from 1930 to 1933, without success.
Bottom Right: This early example of *Dagwood*’s classic food balancing technique shows how he is visually distinguishable from *Hiho* only by a small difference in height and hairstyle.

Dagwood was introduced in 1933 as the rich playboy and son of railroad tycoon J. Bollinger Bumstead. *Blondie* had to make a choice between the ne’er-do-well *Hiho* and *Dagwood*’s millions. We all know whom she chose, but the adventures of a rich

playboy and a gorgeous flapper during the century’s greatest economic recession failed to generate mass audience appeal.

So Young stripped *Dagwood* of his millions leaving the newlyweds to “live on love.”



Left: *Hiho Hennepin*.

After the Honeymoon...

In the early stages of the marriage, many of the gags centered on the class conflict that ensued from the interaction of Blondie with her blustering and social climbing in-laws. In one strip, Dagwood's parents refuse to allow Blondie to accompany her husband on their yacht for fear that she will dis-



grace them in front of the guests. In order to sneak on the ship, Blondie dresses in drag as a manservant. She is eventually discovered by her father-in-law who chases her up a pole in a fit of rage! It is difficult to imagine the modern Blondie going to such lengths for a free cruise.

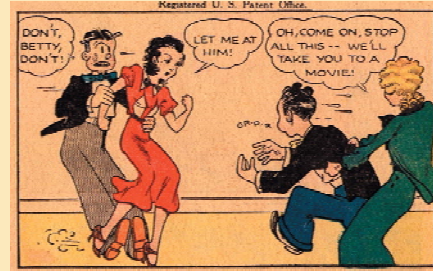
Young soon abandoned this approach of making strips that concentrated on the clash between Blondie and her in-laws and shifted his direction toward the creation of an image of Blondie and Dagwood as the average white, middle class, American couple. Having been disowned by his parents for marrying Blondie, Dagwood got a job at the J. C. Dithers Construction Company, effacing all traces of his affluent origins.

Right: Having been chased up a pole by her father-in-law, Blondie reveals her identity by removing a fake moustache. Although dressed as a man, she retains her heels (5/14/1933).

Above Left: Dagwood's parents voice their objections to his marrying the lower class Blondie (2/5/1933).

Above Right: Hiho and Betty's hot-blooded marriage was in direct contrast to Blondie and Dagwood's stable relationship (3/15/1933).

As with Dagwood's wealthy parents, Hiho was left behind in the thirties. Hiho



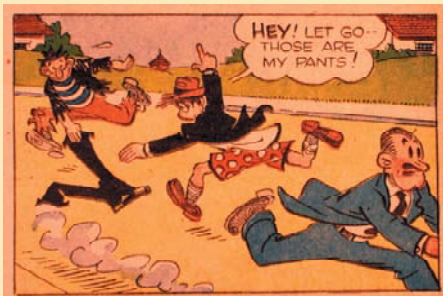
married a girl named Betty in the same week Blondie married Dagwood. All of Hiho's appearances afterward centered on his relationship with Betty which was an endless cycle of violent fights and passionate make-ups. Young did not wish to continue making strips based on the dynamic between the two couples, so Hiho and Betty soon disappeared and Herb and Tootsie Woodley were introduced as the Bumstead's neighbors. Instead of Hiho and Betty's brawling which would today be regarded as domestic violence, Young now depicted a rivalry between Herb and Dagwood in which they often exchanged blows.



Time Passes Timelessly

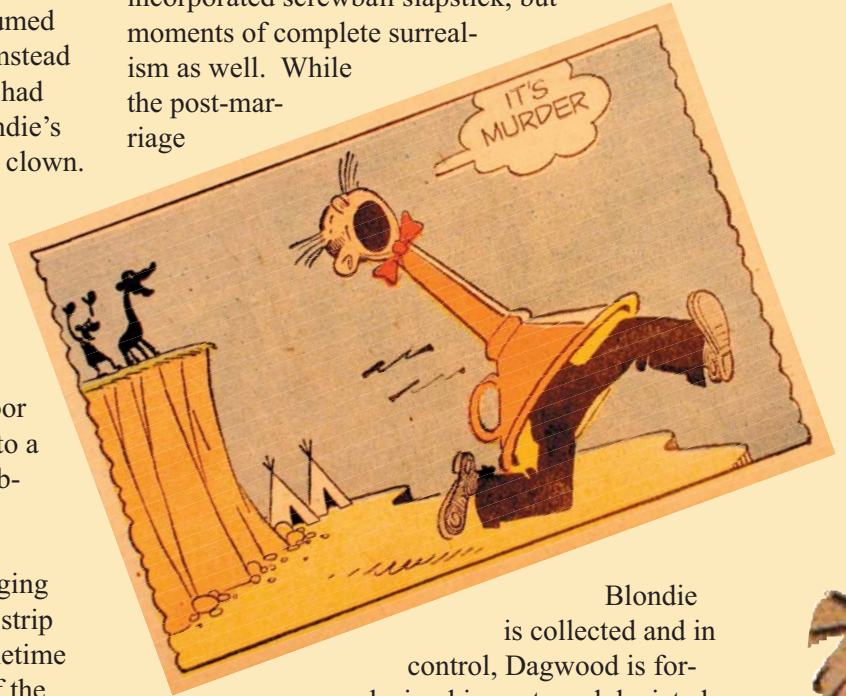
Although the characters do not obey the conventional laws of aging, *Blondie*'s marriage marked the beginning of a change in her personality. From that point forward, she gradually assumed her position as the sensible head of the Bumstead household. And Dagwood, who previously had been cast in the role of straight man to Blondie's comic antics, took over as the comic strip's clown. The many running gags centered on Dagwood have become *Blondie*'s focal point—most famously the monstrous sandwiches he concocts from leftovers, but also his frustrated attempts at napping, chronic lateness, collisions with the mailman Mr. Beasley, struggles with door-to-door salesmen and ability to send Mr. Dithers into a rage. Dagwood's comic routines were established in the early years of the strip.

Over the decades, adjustments for the changing times have been made to the content of the strip (although the characters stopped aging sometime in the sixties). Dagwood now rushes out of the house late for his carpool instead of the bus and although he still works for Mr. Dithers, he has entered the 21st century working as the company's webmaster. Blondie continues to be the household's manager doing most of the cleaning and cooking. The big difference is that now, in keeping with the contemporary lifestyle of many women, she has a double workload since opening



a catering business with her neighbor Tootsie Woodley in 1991.

While *Blondie* may exist outside of linear time, Chic Young was a master of comic timing. Producing *Blondie* on a daily basis refined his sense of pacing such that many of the early strips not only incorporated screwball slapstick, but moments of complete surrealism as well. While the post-marriage



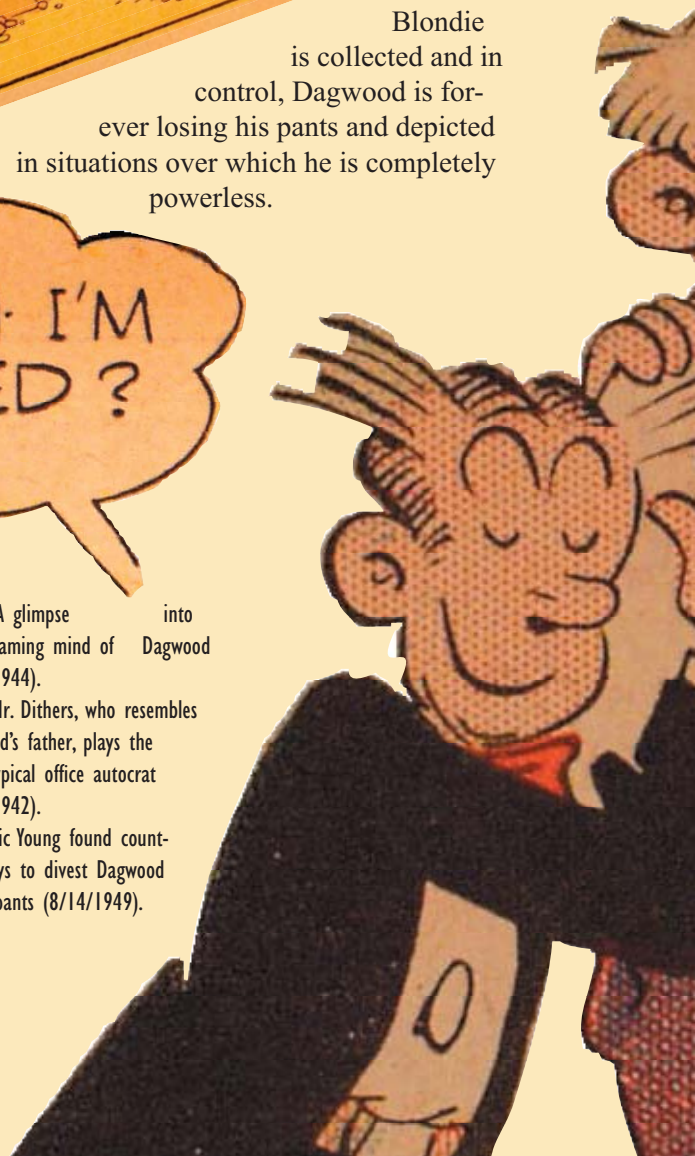
Blondie is collected and in control, Dagwood is forever losing his pants and depicted in situations over which he is completely powerless.



Above: A glimpse into the dreaming mind of Dagwood (2/27/1944).

Right: Mr. Dithers, who resembles Dagwood's father, plays the stereotypical office autocrat (11/1/1942).

Left: Chic Young found countless ways to divest Dagwood of his pants (8/14/1949).



The Exhibit

We hope that the comic strips exhibited will give the viewer a sense of *Blondie* in its formative years. There once was a time when Blondie's culinary skills were not as advanced as they are today and Cookie and Alexander (formerly called "Baby Dumpling") were not frozen in perpetual adolescence as the uncanny doubles of their parents. On display are strips that feature Blondie and Dagwood's tumultuous wedding, the successive birth and development of Cookie and Alexander, and the forgotten characters such as spirited Hiho and Dagwood's wealthy parents. We also chose strips that were representative of the different historical moments throughout which Young produced *Blondie*.



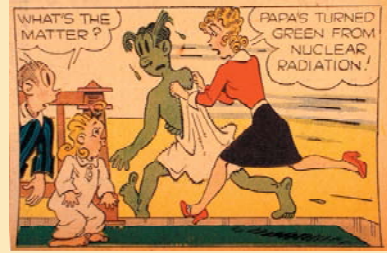
Above: Alexander "Baby Dumpling" Bumstead.

Top Right: Dagwood experimented with nuclear energy in strips from the 1940s.

Below: One of the many Little Big Books in the Baldwin collection.

The Collection

The *Blondie* strips are taken from the Don Ault collection, which has a run of the series from 1931-53 and is housed in The Special

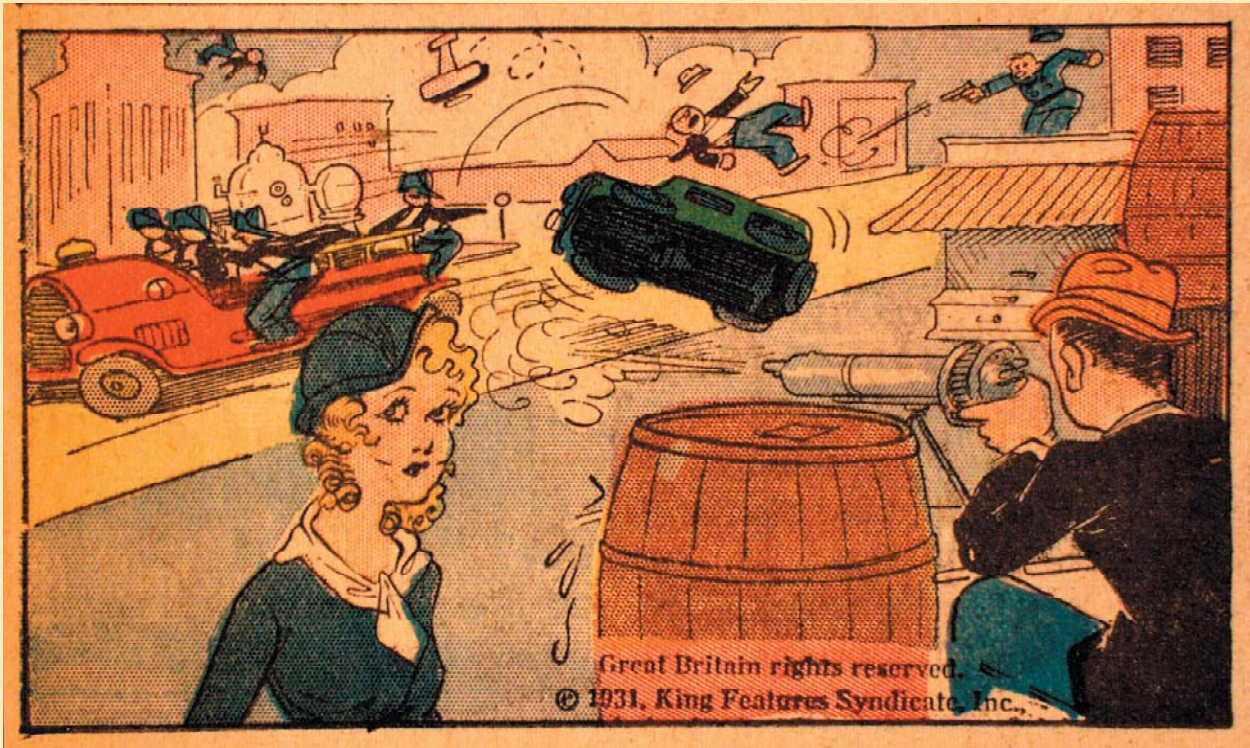


Collections Department in the University of Florida's Smathers Library. The newspaper strips that Dr. Ault has generously donated were initially given to him by the avid newspaper strip collector Bill Wright, a Disney comic artist who is known for his work on Mickey Mouse comics. Contemporary strips are courtesy of *The Gainesville Sun* and the Little Big Books, donated by Penny and Sol Davidson, are part of the library's Baldwin Collection.

We invite those interested in further examining the *Blondie* strips to visit the Smathers Library Special Collections and Area Studies Department which is open to the public.

Special Thanks to: Mil Willis for his continual support and creative solutions without which the exhibit would not have been possible.





Above: Panel from November 11, 1931 strip.



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