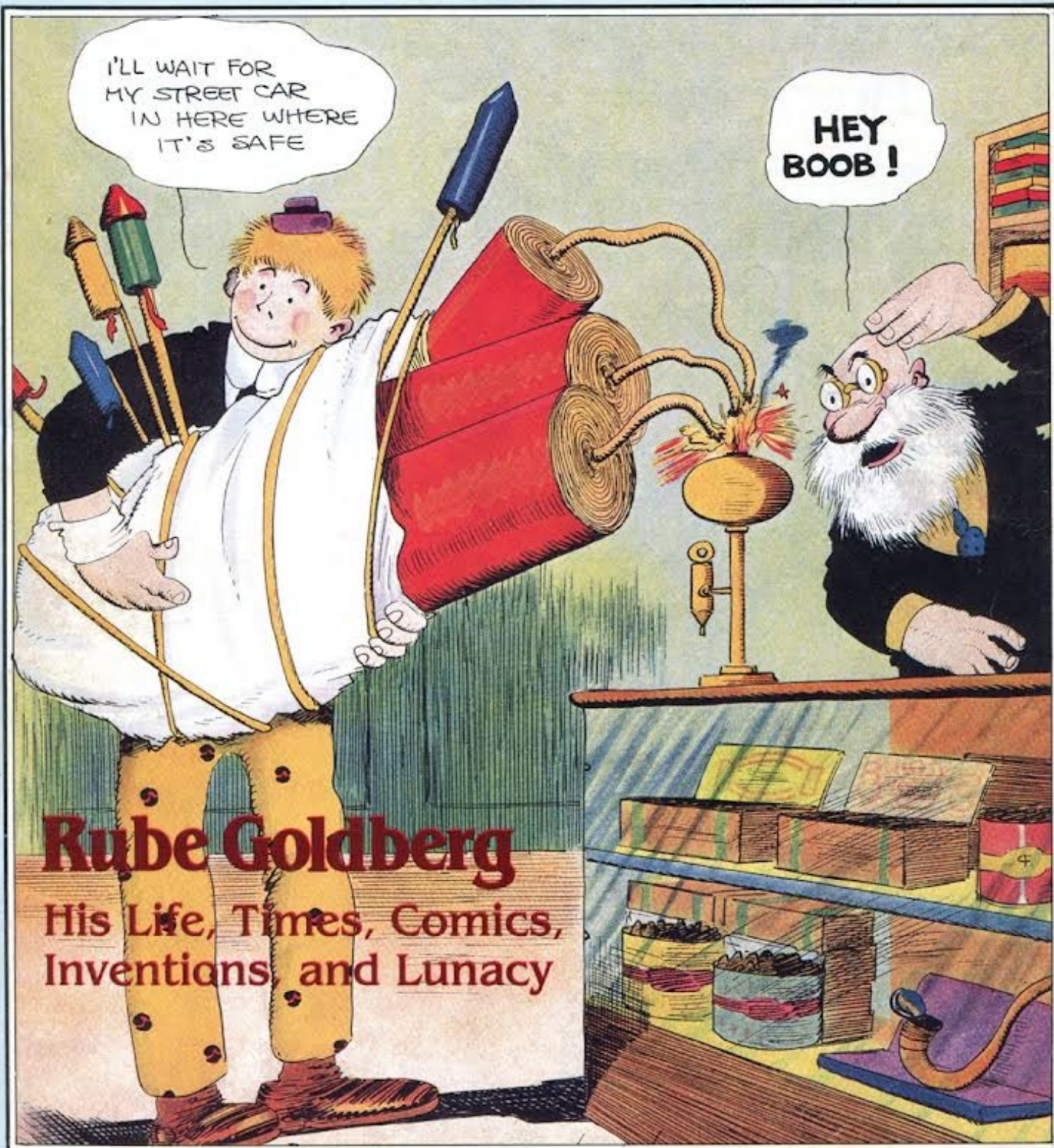
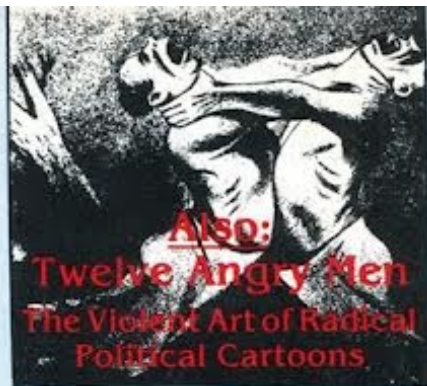


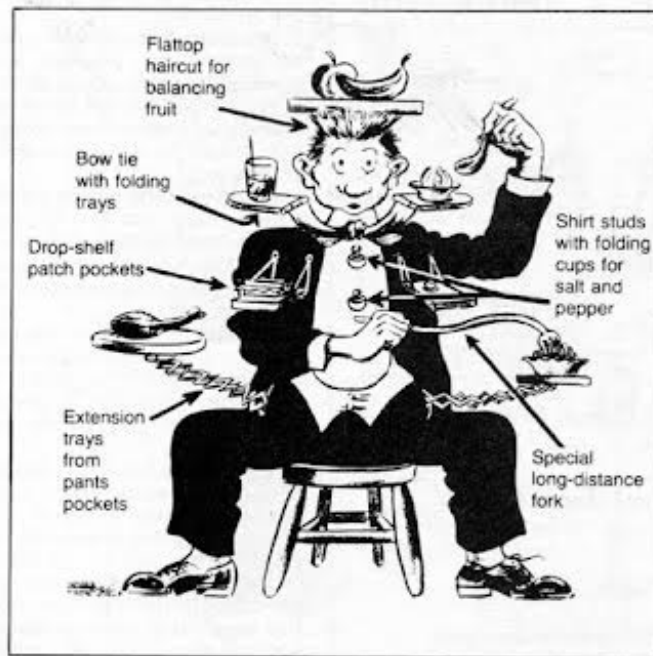
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# Cartooning's Renaissance Man



## 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.

# DAY'S SPORTS

## AMATEUR TARS HAVE A MERRY TIME



One of Goldberg's earliest sports cartoons (August 9, 1904).

One has to balance his judgment on Rube Goldberg. His earlier work, done prior to 1930, was simply sensational. He was delightfully inventive, racy in ideas and drawing! 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 Secman; 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 Boob McNutt was widely syndicated by Hearst's Star Company. In 1921 the McNaught 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.

Rube dabbled in vaudeville, doing chaktalks. 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 1934 after a disastrous attempt at writing and drawing a continuity strip. He turned to humorous articles and short stories for popular magazines, which he had previously contributed. (He had also 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 Palooza*, but this fizzled in less than two years; he drew yet another Sunday cartoon, *Sideshow*, until 1940.

In 1938, he entered an entirely new field—political cartooning. He drew for the *New York Sun*, and won the Pulitzer Prize 10 years later.

By 1964 he'd tired of the political scene, but he had already found his new challenge—comic sculpture.

As his longtime 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! His voice hushed with cancer, he kept murmuring, "Where the hell did they get this?" It was his final triumph; he went home to work on another comic statue, and passed away less than two weeks later.

The author had an interview in depth with Goldberg on June 10, 1964, and had I seen him before and after that date, I had collected all of his books, had managed to get several of his original cartoons, including a political cartoon that he inscribed to me. I had located long runs of all of his strips. He was, frankly, one of my greatest idols.

(A session with him was on a par with only three other cartoonists I have met: Herblock, in Washington, DC, in 1953; David Low in London in 1959; and Roy Crane in Florida in 1971. Low was, as expected, somewhat formal; Herblock was informal and Mid-western friendly; and Crane always made you feel comfortable in his soft-spoken style. Rube Goldberg was all smiles. A warmer person you'd never meet.)

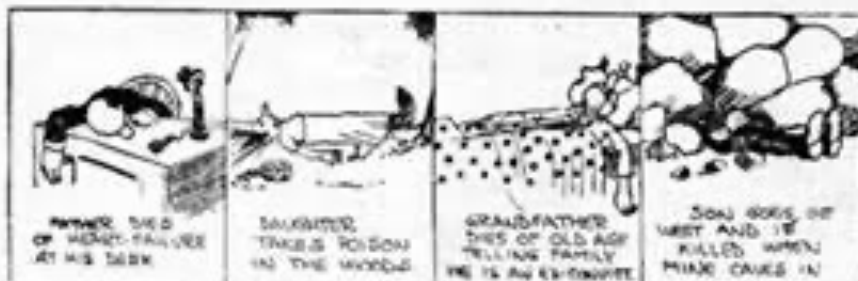
I still have my notes from that interview. I wrote a short news story for the *San Francisco Examiner* that ran the next day; I

### Light and Shadow in the Police Court.



December 8, 1905.

## 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.



Circa 1916.

From the collection of Jim Ivey

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 files 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 aghast 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 stuff 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 Gillray to Goldberg." Rube wrote the foreword. He did an excellent job of it (though I question that Nast ever worked on chalkboards):

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 Vallejo Street my avid interest in cartooning led me to familiarize myself with the early names represented in this fine collection of originals Jim Ivey has gathered from all parts of the world—Hogarth, Tenniel, Nast, 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 zany's accidentally gifted with the facility of pulling scrawls 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 Easyville—quite an accomplishment for a novice within his first year.



A selection of Goldberg's *Foolish Questions* which originally ran as fillers in his sports cartoons, and later gathered together for his first book collection (1909).

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 oneshy 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 sum-

mons 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.P.A.) with giving him the idea for *Foolish Questions*, his first big hit series, which ran as space fillers in his sports cartoons after 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 his first book was a collection of *Foolish Questions*, published in 1909 by Small, Maynard.

In his sports cartoons, Goldberg was following Thomas A.



"It May Have Been a Good Idea at That," July 10, 1916.



From the collection of John Terry

Dorgan's approach—an informal, irreverent attitude toward the games and players. But, of course, Rube always had his own touch. Sports was too limiting an area for either Goldberg or Dorgan; their talents were too big to be confined to any one field.

### 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 comments on current events, fads, or fashions; they often-times dealt with the human condition in general. Goldberg could sense the irony in things (the inept nomenclature of a forbidding "Welcome Inn"; the poor genius beside the wealthy boob); he could sniff out sham (snobs become gladhanders at election time; a couple sniff 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, impossibly ridiculous statues, and floorlamps. 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 Seides 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 grotesquerie. 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.



From the collection of John Terry



"Mike and Ike - They Look Alike," November 11, 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.

Rube's 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 Follies of 1926* (or 1927), he ran *The Battling Browns: Luke and His Ike*, 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 sidebars were sparkling 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 lose 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 1937-38. The *Sunday Sideshow* carried a weekly invention from 1938-40. He did many advertising cartoons featuring them, along with commissions from *Time* and *Newsweek* 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.

Cornelius Veth in *Comic Art in England* (London, 1950) wrote of W. Heath Robinson: "As an inventor of impossible machines and absurd monuments, he certainly has a merit all his own..."

"So He Took It Out on His Wife," October 25, 1921.









"Bobo Baxter," May 14, 1927.

niture, and fixtures, and names of characters, like Major Gumbo, Hard Rock Pete (both villains), Carmen Spumoni, Vacuum McNutt, Wart, Owl, and Malaria McNutt. 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 Footwoogle and Dinklewump. All represented good fun, and added to the result that *Boob McNutt*, overall, was a successful effort.

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

For 10 weeks—Jan. 28-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 Clothespin-headed *Clop Clops*. He later created *Are You Seeing Jokers?*, featuring playing cards with movie star pastiches (example: *Zazu McNutt*, 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 Seldes 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 *Lala Palooza* 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 Mullins* and *Barney Google* of the same era, but the strip was short-lived.

"Doc Wright," January 31, 1934.



Perhaps Rube preferred the changing patterns of Human Interest gags that reclaimed the spot 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*, *Talisman 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, unmentioned, November 13 of the same year.

Al Capp wrote a proper epitaph in *The Smithsonian*, November, 1970: "The *Doc* was a Lincoln-esque character—selfless, heroic, kindly, philosophical; in short, an asphyxiating 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, it 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



"You Gussed It — He's Running for Office," August, 15, 1924.

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); Slugg O'Toole and Biff McThick, boxers; Hppo McGoosh; Bicarbonate Lang; Anatole Zapp; Petrograd Gaul; Orlando McCloud; Blodgett, Grouse and Ippie, Attorneys; Willie Peanuts; Joab K. Silly; and, of course, Boob McNutt. (Keep in mind, Rube's "square" name was Reuben Lucius. . .)

Goldberg, like other top cartoonists, added many words and phrases to our language: "Bolooney," "Phoney Bolooney," "I'm Cured," "Lalaloosa," "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 *Is 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 1936 with *Lala Palooza*, handled by the newly formed Frank Jay Markey Syndicate. Markey had been with the McNaught 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: to Rube it was rather 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 heavyhanded use of slapstick. There is sparse use of Goldberg's trademarks, such as looney statuary and ridiculous names.

The cast was small: Lala; Vincent; Hives the butler; Babette the maid; Aristopolis Sr. and Jr., cook and cook's helper; Pinto the dog; Prof. Van Gadget (he invented the Hydrocar that ran on water); Gonzales, a suitor; 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 chubby Lala had before finally vanished. The strip died in 1938 after less than a two-year run.

"The Language That Motorcycle Cops Understand," September 4, 1925.





### RUBE GOLDBERG

World famous humorist . . . creator of "Mike and Ike, They Look Alike", Boob McNutt, Foolish Questions, Prof. Lucifer Butt's Inventions, "Tom The Guy" . . . creator of phrases that live in American speech. . .

presents

## Lala Palooza

—a new comic strip that will shortly become an American classic . . . a laugh sensation that will brighten your day—every day . . . and the most amusing character ever concocted by this master of humor. . .



### Countess Lala Palooza

Inherited a title, a garage full of dough, a yen for romance and a tendency towards overweight. But she figured out for herself that Society with a capital S is her dish—and is trying hard to break it. Lala is a direct action dame but has a heart of pure gold, well sheathed in avoidance. You'll like Lala!



Vincent, poor boy, is Lala's brother and her permanent guest. Vince is the laziest man in the world. Not a bad fella, just weak.

Gonzales is Lala's admirer, an ambitious guy who is studying to be a gigolo. He dresses well, and that's about all he does well. As plucky as a movie star's eyelashes. He wants to marry Lala—and her dough!



Hives, the chauffeur and pooch valet, who puts up with as much as he gets away with or vice versa.



Pinto, is Lala's pet pooch and universal pain in the neck. Pinto will kill you, if somebody doesn't kill it first.

Starting Monday in

The Florida Times-Union

A FANCY COAT  
COVERS A MULTITUDE  
OF SINS.



FABLES OF FRANKLIN D.

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

Left: A newspaper advertisement promoting Goldberg's new strip *Lala Palooza*. (February 20, 1937)

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 *Telephonics* panel and, in the end, *Rube Goldberg's Foolish Invention* 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'd 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

*Sideshow* (1938-40) used ingredients Rube had used years before. *Brad and Dad* used the lead character from *Bill*, the *Boob*



March, 1940.

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

*Pepsi & Pete*, for example, showed the cops using suspenders for a slingshot, a ship's 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 *Lala Palooza*.

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 touted *Lucky Strike* cigarettes in a four-color ad!

Rube was playing another joke on us.

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



From the collection of Richard Murnighan



"Life's Little Jokes — Number 483,006," September 12, 1925.



"Easter Bonnets — Then and Now," March 30, 1929.



"The Weekly Meeting of the 'I Woulda Made Club,'" March 27, 1929.

## 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 Mail*. 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



"Life Generally Even's Things Up," March 18, 1929.



From the collection of Jim Tate



"Not Altogether Spoiled," March 29, 1929.



From the collection of Jim Tate

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 hoping 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 *Pagant*, told of Rube's solution to a big problem he encountered 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" inside 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, uproaring laughter that pulled the midriff 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 its day 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 interview 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 Lucius 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: Cartoons in three dimensions. His son Tom, a serious (why fight the terms?) 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 trying 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." Especially 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 characterized 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!"



Goldberg and sculpture, clockwise from left: design for The Reuben Award, "Three Wise Men," "Romeo and Juliet," self portrait, "People Don't Like Kings Anymore," "A Big One," and (center) "David and Goliath."

## 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 Cartoonist 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. . ."

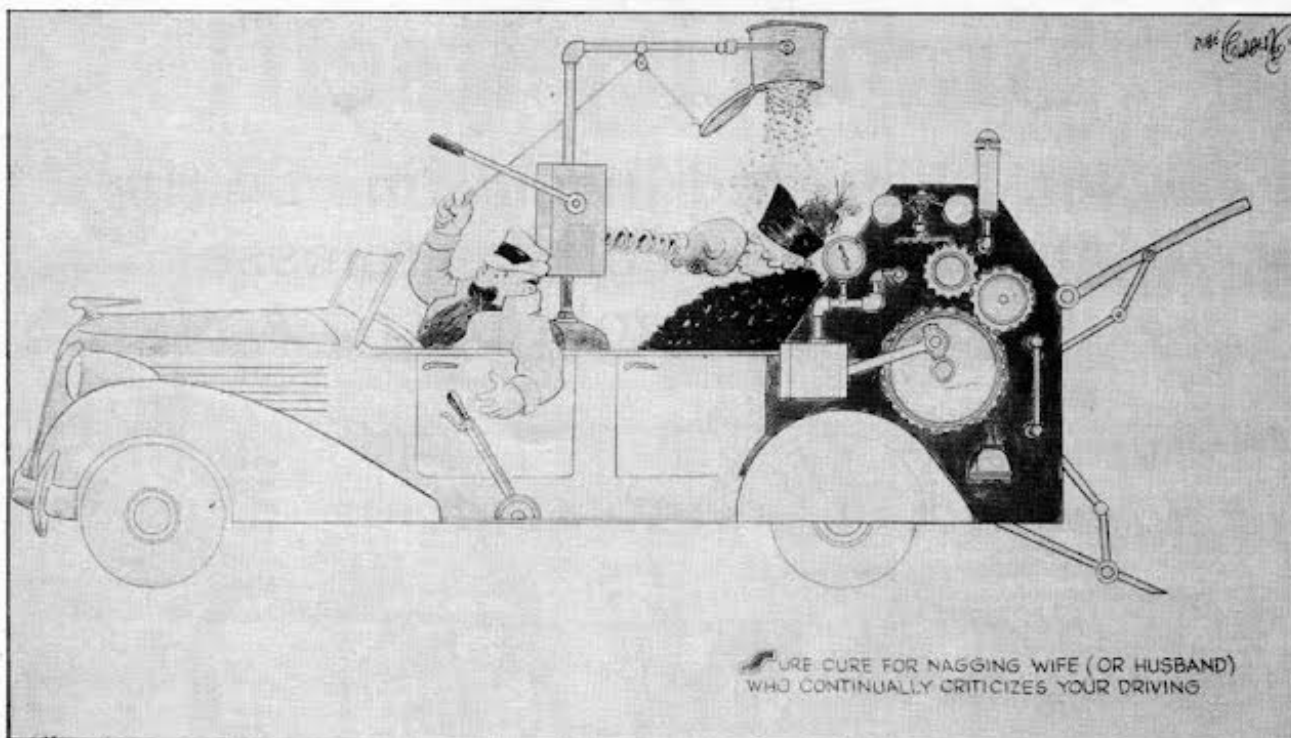
In his last speech, read by his sons at the Smithsonian exhibit of his works in November, 1970, Rube wrote: "I have heard cartoonists and writers try to explain the essence of their humor—how they work and why something is funny. I believe that a humorist is born with his own peculiar sense of humor 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:

"BOLONEY!"

Rube Goldberg was unique.

He was THE classic American cartoonist.



## The Works of Rube Goldberg

**Sports cartoons:** *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1904-1904 (9 months); *San Francisco Bulletin*, 1904-06; *New York Mail*, 1906-1910. Series in sports cartoons: *Easyville*, 1905; *Lunatics I Have Met*; *The Candy Kid*; *If Plays Were Only True to Life*.

**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 Ravings*; *But It Doesn't Mean Anything*; *They All Look Good When You're Far Away*; *They All Come Back For More*; *Aw, 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 1930s).

**Panels within comic strips** (1908-1940) (These ran in the sports cartoons, in the daily strips until 1934; also in *Boob McNutt* (B); *Lala Palooza* (L); *Sideshow* (S).) *Foolish Questions*; *I'm the Guy*; 50-50; *Phoney Films*; *Slackers*; *Steve Himself*; *Captain Johnny*; *Phoney Bolonies*; *Boob News*; *Diolde by Two and You're Nearer Right*; *Battling Browns*; *Blind Boobs*; *Chamber of Horrors*; *Luke & His Uke*; *Famous Trouble Makers*; *Alphabet Soup*; *Mr. Alf of the Alphabet*; *Sapograms*; *He Don't Know From Nothing*; *Telephonies*; *Boloney*; *Benny*

*Sent Me*; *Boob McNutt's Ark* (B); *Boob 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 *Ettiquette* (S).

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

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

**Daily strips:** *Bobo Baxter* 1927-28; *Doc Wright*, 1934.

**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.); *Boob 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!*

**Political Cartoons:** *New York Evening Mail*, 1906-1910; *New York Sun*, 1938-1949; *New York Journal-American* and King Features Syndicate, 1949-1964.

**Comic Sculptures:** 1964-1970.

**Books:** *Foolish Questions*, 1909; *Chasing the Blues*, 1912; *Seeing History at Close Range*, 1914; *Is There a Doctor in the House?*, 1929; *The Rube Goldberg Plan for the Post-War World*, 1944; *Rube Goldberg's Guide to Europe*, 1954; *How to Remove the Cotton from a Bottle of Aspirin*, 1959; *I Made My Bed*, 1960.