



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

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Kate Smith 1909--1986

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

Dedicated to the preservation of old time radio programs and to making those programs available to our members.

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AT THE KINGS RESIDENCE 7:30 PM 900 W. QUINCY AVE. ENGLEWOOD

Old tme radio is alive in Denver

- ◆ John Dunning's OTR Program on KHOW 630 Saturday evening 9:00 till 11:00 PM
- ◆ John Rayburn's "Reminiscing with Rayburn" Saturday evenings 6:00 till 11:00 PM KEZW 1430
- ◆ KEZW has syndicated OTR weekdays from 7:00 till 9:00 PM 1430 on the dial.
- ◆ KEZW Imagination Theater Sundays 5:00 till 6:00 PM

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RHAC web page and catalog is on the world wide web. <http://www.old-time.com> take a look here there is a lot of otr information at this site.

RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of the *Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a nonprofit organization. Cost of membership is \$25.00 for the first year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.

Phone numbers are in the (303) area code except where indicated.

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The Kings Roost

Henny Ringel, please return our tapes.

Member Henny Ringel, 1310 48th St., Brooklyn, NY 11219, phone 718-438-3000 has tapes from the reel-to-reel library and has not returned them. Her order was shipped 10/18 and she has been called and written to. If any of our members in that area can persuade her to return the club's property, we certainly would appreciate your help. She also has an order out from one of the cassette libraries, and it is due now.

RHAC catalog is on the WEB. WEB users can review it by calling ^{up} <http://www.old-time.com/files/rhac.zip>. This is a zip file and can be downloaded.

This can be a handy tool, but your hard copy that is sent when you join, and we add to it every month, should be kept up so you can note the reels or shows that you have already received. One

member thought that we should give him credit for ones he ordered a second time, but it doesn't work that way.

We are having some problems with some of the cassettes . They just seem to fade away in spots, or are blank in spots. We have determined that they have been set too close to a magnetic field by someone. The person(s) that are damaging the tapes probably are not aware of the problems since they may have already run their copies before it happened. Please be sure that if you are using a degausser to erase tapes that you do not have any of the club tapes or cassettes in the area.

One person on the E mail wants to find a copy of an Al Pearce show with a comedian Tizzy Lish. He has an old uncle that would like to hear that voice once more. If you have such a show please let us know.

This week one of our members sent us a copy of a Jack Benny script of a show broadcast November 18, 1945 from Birmingham Hospital in Van Nuys, CA. We do not find the show in our library, but do find the listing in the log that the Gassmans put out, so we know it was broadcast. This script and several others that have been sent to us will be added to our library so all of our members can enjoy them.

Reading the articles on Kate Smith makes me remember the time when the United States was truly united. *God Bless America* was on the air every day, several times a day. No one objected, the song just inspired us more. If there were individuals that thought of protesting, they kept it to themselves, as they knew the general population would not put up with their nonsense. Housewives worked in factories, men did the heavy work or were in the armed forces, we had to limit our driving because of rationing of both gas and tires, meat and dairy products were rationed, and we were all united. *Praise The Lord and Pass The Amunition, Goodby Dear, I'll be back in a Year, Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree* and dozens more were the themes of the day. Nearly every family had someone in the armed forces and the stores were closed on Sundays.

This brings to mind a cassette that we have that is very hard to listen to. It was put together by a survivor of the Bataan Death March. It is on a C-90 and we will be glad to make copies for any member interested in having it . It should be part of the the study of American History for any high school class--- Lest We Forget.

KATE SMITH

She was nearly seventeen years old when she got a part in a show called *Honeymoon Lane* and it turned out to be a heart-breaker for her. Even the name of the character (Tiny Little) was in itself just another cruel way of poking fun at her size, although that didn't occur to her at first. She wanted the job so much it just didn't matter -- not until later.

The parents of Kathryn Elizabeth Smith, especially her father, had not been very much in favor of a show business career for their daughter, but she had the dream early and never wavered. She had won several five-dollar gold pieces at the Keith Theater in Washington, D.C. and was told by the manager he might be able to get her a week's engagement, probably going on the bill with a comedian.

Her father bristled at the thought and insisted she was going to nursing school after high school. He even went so far as to say, "Don't forget that you well--you have a handicap..."

Kathryn replied, "You mean I'm fat, don't you?" Little did she know how much more she'd hear of that later.

First, though, she did go to nursing school and hated it. A fellow student persuaded her

that if she felt she was good enough to earn a living singing that she should do it

Kate won some more gold pieces at amateur nights and several months later gave up nursing when she got that belated week's engagement.

The job resulted in her being seen by producer Abe Erlanger and he offered her the Tiny Little role in *Honeymoon Lane* where she would do the Charleston and sing a few numbers.

She told her family and even her dad relented, saying, "It's obvious this is what you want, and I admire you for having stuck it out. You have my blessing."

She would need it. Soon, she was staying in a sordid little hotel room in New York and having to put up with the cruelty of fellow cast members. No one ever invited her out to dinner with the others and in her mind she could hear a chorus boy greeting her as she arrived at the theater with a snide remark, "Hello, Fatty."

She had heard someone say as they all bought coffee and doughnuts at a stand. "Betcha she buys a dozen doughnuts and a gallon of coffee." A photographer came to take cast pictures for the theater foyer and someone asked if they could get all of her in one picture. Even worse, the play's

comedian used cruel ad libs on stage aimed at her size.

That first show of hers finally closed at the start of 1929 and she got a six-month part as a colored Mammy in the touring company of *Hit The Deck*. A year later she got into a new musical, *Flying High*, where she would sing a few numbers but also still have to act as a stooge for comedians all because of her size. She was making good money and had her own apartment but she was disappointed that the public still thought of her first as a fat girl who good-naturedly put up with funny remarks, and only second as a singer. But, there was more bitterness ahead...

Just a few weeks after the opening of *Flying High*, Kate got a telegram saying her father was very ill. She called producer George White and told him her dad was probably dying, but he wouldn't let her off, saying she had a contract and he'd hold her personally responsible for any loss if she didn't show up. She was appalled by his inhumanity but was cowed by the threat because she didn't have enough experience to know it would never stand up in court and there were no friends in the cast to advise her.

So, she did the show, dashed to Penn Station, caught a train home, and arrived in time for

her taxi to pull up behind an undertaker's car.

When she returned to New York, she refused to acknowledge White and vowed that, from then, she would give up everything to go to her family whenever they wanted her. "The show must go on" was meaningless to her.

Coupled with her sorrow was the fact that constant digs at her size multiplied the feelings of grief. Her mother thought it might cheer her up if her grandparents came to visit and see the show. Her grandparents were embarrassed for her

She showed them the sights but was wondering what to do about what she knew would happen on stage - more barbs about her size. Before the show, she went to one of the comedians to ask him to take it easy, but there was little hope. She tripped over a basket and he quipped he was glad she didn't fall on him because they'd have to scrape him up with a palette knife. Her plea for fewer ad libs got nowhere; the request actually made the comics that much worse. Backstage, her Granny said to forget the terrible play and come home. Her grandfather asked if she didn't have more self-respect than to allow herself to be used as a butt for such cheap, nasty remarks, evening after evening. She told them she had to stay because

of her contract and insisted she still wanted to sing professionally.

A couple of months later, a man came backstage, told her he was recording manager for the Columbia Phonograph Company and he felt it was a shame that only people in the theater could hear her lovely voice.

His name was Ted Collins and the meeting led to a long and prosperous relationship. He did make a record of her singing; it sold quite a few copies and more recordings followed. *Flying High* was going to close at the end of January of 1931. Kate wanted to sing more than ever but decided she would never be laughed at again in such a show. Ted told her not to worry -- that he would become her manager and take care of everything -- bookings, career, finances, etc. He told her, "We're going a long way together. We'll be millionaires before you know what to do with a million dollars."

They shook hands on it and that's the only contract they ever had -- with no signed papers and no lawyers.

The stage show closed and she went home for a vacation, where she got a call from Collins in March, 1931 saying she was booked to sing (and only sing) five times a day at the Capitol Theater for a good many weeks.

Six weeks later, audiences were growing steadily and Ted told her she was going to be on the radio next.* He'd arranged a 15-minute nightly show on CBS at 7:00 p.m. -- whoops, it was opposite *Amos 'n' Andy!* How could she compete with that? Also, there was no sponsor and the pay was only ten dollars per show. It started on May 1st, her 21st birthday! The switchboard lit up after the show and within thirty days, Kate Smith was sponsored by La Palina Cigars and the pay was \$1,500 a week and inside of six months *Amos 'n' Andy* moved to a different time to avoid competing with her.

Within two years of the first program, Kate got an hour show on Thursday evenings and earnings went up to \$5,000 a week. In the spring of 1938 she became a commentator on a noon program that became a regular daily feature of American life. November 11th, 1938 she launched Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," with exclusive two-year rights to the song. She later did several war bond marathons, raising a hundred and ten million dollars on one of them. A climactic time for one who started so humbly and became one of the nation's most beloved performers on records, radio, TV and in person.

* When Kate told her Granny she might get to sing on this "new wireless system," her Granny said, "Oh, that's being foolish. That thing's just a novelty; they'll have forgotten all about it in a year or two."

Article is from The "Thrilling Days of Yesteryear 7/8/1995.

memories of Kate Smith - 'The Songbird of the South'

When the phone rang and her unmistakable voice said, "Hello, this is "Kate Smith", it was the start of a fond relationship for this writer.

*By Richard Hayes, Cranston, Rhode Island
(from Reminisce magazine)*

Kate Smith was not only the beloved entertainer of a generation, she was a truly nice person. I had the pleasure of learning that personally through working with her for many years.

Kathryn Elizabeth Smith, born in Greenville, Virginia, played her first professional role in 1928 at age 19. Cast as a plump, comic buffoon in a Broadway production called *Honeymoon Lane*, she immediately stole the show with her singing and dancing.

In the 1930 comedy *Flying High*, Kate Smith endured endless jokes about her girth. She moved on to radio when a man named Ted Collins convinced her to give it a try.

By the spring of 1931, Kate had her own show on NBC. Then she moved on to CBS, was given an even better time slot and became a huge success.

In the years that followed, Kate Smith introduced more than 600 songs on her show. Some of the hits she previewed included: *Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams* (1931), *I'm getting Sentimental Over You* (1932), *That Old Feeling* (1937), *Don't Fence Me In* (1944) and *The Old Lamplighter* (1946).

Eventually, Kate became the highest-paid performer in radio. But her real glory years came during World War 11.

During those trying times, she was a tireless morale booster on the home front, moving crowds to patriotic fervor with her heartfelt version of *God Bless America*. She took her show on the road, entertaining at nearly every major military base... and she paid all the expenses herself!

In addition, her radio bond drives sold \$600 million worth of War Bonds, which became a never-matched record for any celebrity.

After the war, television gradually became more popular than radio. Critics predicted that Kate would never succeed on television because of her weight.. but they were wrong. With the wink of an eye and a disarming smile, she won over a whole generation ---including me.

I first saw Kate Smith perform at Carnegie Hall in 1963. I wrote her a fan letter and was amazed to receive a personal reply in beautiful script. That's when I discovered that, despite her talent, Kate was a warm,

caring person who preferred the company of ordinary folks over celebrities.

When a Kate Smith fan club was organized a few years later, I was pleased when she suggested that I become the editor of the club's journals and newsletters.

One day in 1968 phone rang and an unmistakable voice said, "Hello, this is Kate Smith." I was nearly speechless when I realized she'd called to personally give me the latest news of her records and TV appearances.

That summer, Kate graciously invited me to "Camp Sunshine", her island vacation home in Lake Placid, New York. There, we taped a full hour of material for the fan club. Three summers later, I returned to Camp Sunshine with several other invited guests. Kate cooked our meals, played cards with us and took us on a moonlight boat tour of Lake Placid. For as long as I knew her, Kate never failed to ask about my family's health each time we met. If she learned that a member of the fan club was ill, she was quick to send a card or even make a personal phone call to that person. How many of today's stars would even consider that?

Yes, Kate Smith was one of a kind. She made a big impression on the entertainment industry.. but more importantly, she left me and countless other fans with wonderful memories of a warm, big-hearted person. Thank you, Kate!

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION of COLORADO

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