

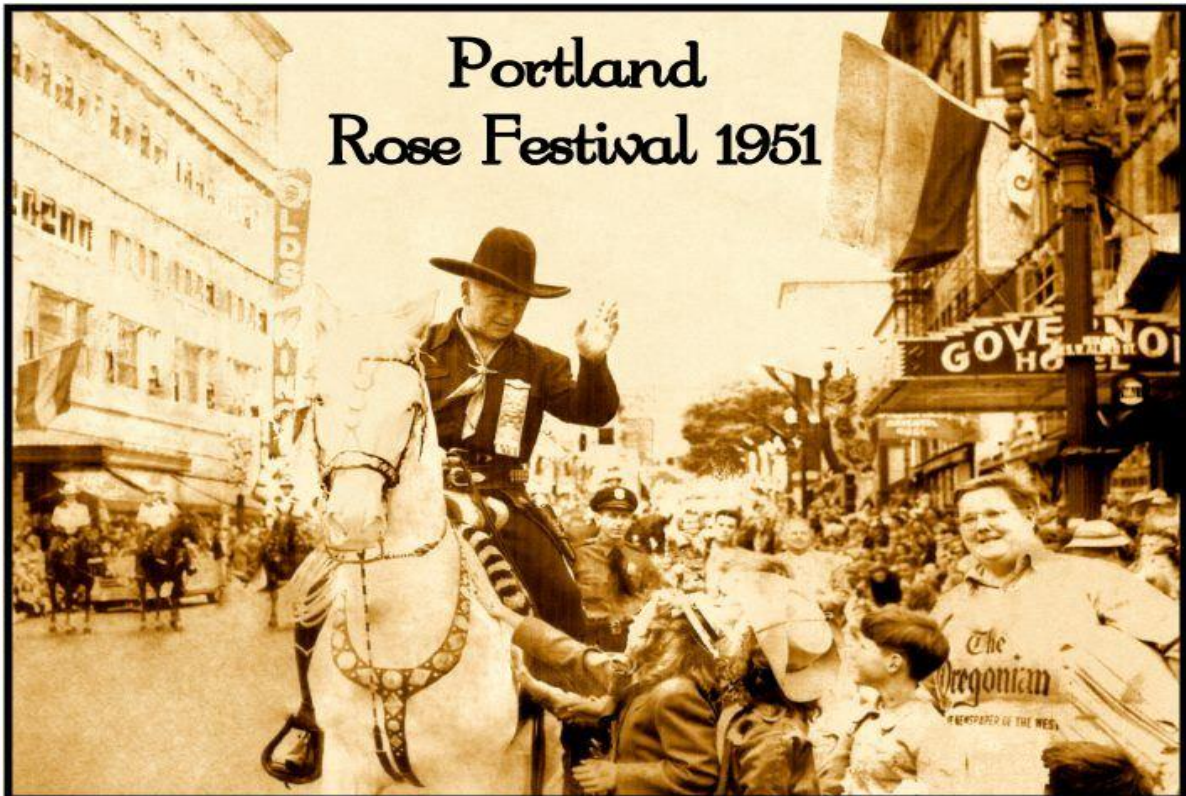


# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

JULY 2016



## *Remembering the Wild, Wild West*



William Boyd as Hopalong Cassidy – Grand Marshal – Photo courtesy of Stephen Kenney – Restoration by Tracy Brown.

- ◆ Remembering the Wild, Wild West – see page 2.



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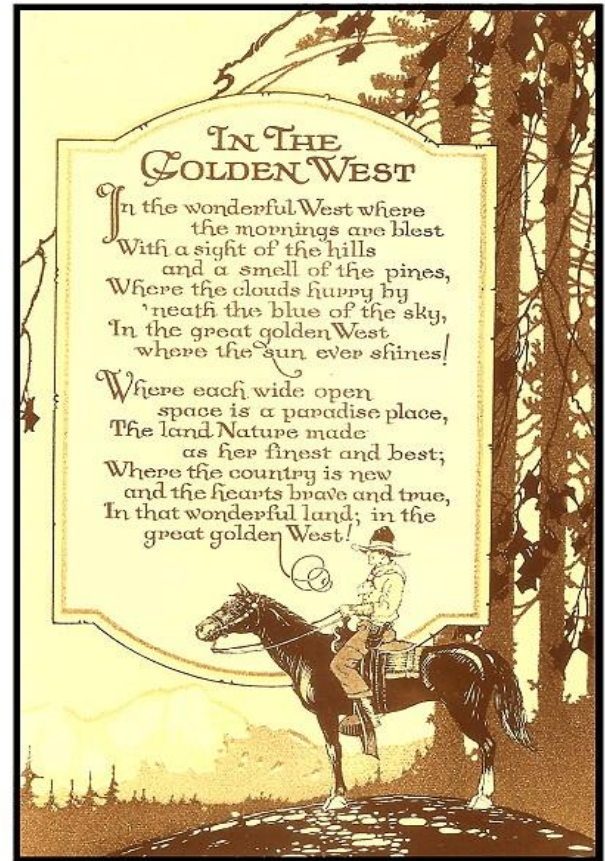


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## Remembering the Wild, Wild West



Western culture is unique to America. Stories of cowboys or gunfighters in the American Old West from the latter half of the 19th Century became the foundation for many western movies, radio programs, television shows, songs, books and yes, postcards that have been a part of American life for many years. With it came cowboys, cowgirls, movie stars, radio stars, TV stars and musicians.

There may be varying claims to the first movie, but one of the very first movies ever produced was "The Horse in Motion" which was produced in 1878. The movie was made to answer the question "Are all four of a horse's hooves ever off the ground at the same time while the horse is galloping." The movie proved that the hooves were indeed off the ground and motion photography was born.

The world's earliest surviving motion-picture film showing actual consecutive action is entitled Roundhay Garden Scene from 1888. Even though it is 2.11 seconds long, the Guinness Book of Records has declared that it is the oldest film in existence. The first film cowboy star, "Broncho Billy" Anderson, whose first film was *The Great Train Robbery* released in 1903, played three roles in the silent western, which audiences loved and led to a successful filmmaking career. He would go on to write, direct and act in over 300 films, including 148 silent westerns under the name Gilbert M. Anderson. When movies became popular in the 1930's, many stars got their start as western actors on the silver screen.





Hopalong Cassidy is a fictional cowboy hero created in 1904 by the author Clarence E. Mulford, who wrote a series of popular short stories and many novels based on the character.

In his early writings, Mulford portrayed the character as rude, dangerous, and rough-talking. From 1935, the character—as played by movie actor William Boyd in films adapted from Mulford's books—was transformed into a clean-cut, sarsaparilla-drinking hero. Sixty-six popular films appeared, only a few of which relied on Mulford's stories. Mulford later revised and republished his works to be more consistent with the character's screen persona.

Chosen to portray cowboy hero Hopalong Cassidy on the screen, William Boyd, born in 1895, was usually clad strikingly in black (including his hat, an exception to the western film stereotype that only villains wore black hats). He was reserved and well spoken, with a sense of fair play. He was often called upon to intercede when dishonest characters took advantage of honest citizens. "Hoppy" and his white horse, Topper, usually traveled through the west with two companions—one young and trouble-prone with a weakness for damsels in distress, the other older, comically awkward and outspoken.

The 66 Hopalong Cassidy pictures were filmed by independent producers who released the films through the studios. The first "Hoppies," as the films were known, were distributed by Paramount Pictures to favorable returns, and United Artists was the distributor after Paramount. They were noted for fast action and outdoor photography. Harry Sherman wanted to make more ambitious movies and tried to cancel the Cassidy series, but popular demand forced Sherman back into production, this time for United Artists. Sherman gave up the series in 1944, but William Boyd wanted to keep it going. To do this, he gambled his future on Hopalong Cassidy, mortgaging most of what he owned to buy the character rights from Mulford and the backlog of movies from Sherman.



In the first film, Hopalong Cassidy (then spelled "Hop-along") got his name after being shot in the leg. Hopalong's "drink of choice" was the nonalcoholic sarsaparilla. Boyd resumed production in 1946, on lower budgets, and continued through 1948, when "B" westerns were being phased out. Boyd thought Hopalong Cassidy might have a future in television, spent \$350,000 to obtain the rights to his old films and approached the fledgling NBC network. The initial broadcasts were so successful that NBC could not wait for a television series to be produced and edited the feature films to broadcast length. On June 24, 1949, *Hopalong Cassidy* became the first network western television series.

The success of the television series made Boyd a star. The Mutual Broadcasting System began broadcasting a radio version in January 1950. At the end of September, the show moved to CBS Radio, where it ran until 1952.

The series and character were so popular that Hopalong Cassidy was featured on the cover of national magazines such as *Look*, *Life* and *Time*. Boyd earned millions as Hopalong mostly from merchandise licensing and endorsement deals. In 1950, Hopalong Cassidy was featured on the first lunchbox to bear an image, causing sales for Aladdin Industries to jump from 50,000 to 600,000 in one year. More than 100 companies manufactured about \$70 million worth of Hopalong Cassidy products in 1950, including children's dinnerware, pillows, roller skates, soap, wristwatches and jackknives.



There was a new demand for Hopalong Cassidy features in movie theaters, and Boyd licensed reissue distributor Film Classics to make new film prints and advertising accessories. Another 1950 enterprise saw the home-movie company Castle Films manufacturing condensed versions of the Paramount films for 16mm and 8mm film projectors; they were sold through 1966. Also, in January 1950, Dan Spiegel began to draw a syndicated comic strip with scripts by Royal King Cole; the strip lasted until 1955.

Boyd began work on a separate series of half-hour westerns made for television; Edgar Buchanan was his new sidekick. The show ranked number seven in the 1949 Nielsen ratings, number nine in the 1950-1951 season and number 28 in 1951-1952. The success of the show and tie-ins inspired juvenile television westerns such as *The Range Rider*, *Tales of the Texas Rangers*, *Annie Oakley*, *The Gene Autry Show* and *The Roy Rogers Show*.

The actor identified with his character, often dressing as a cowboy in public. Although Boyd's portrayal of Hopalong made him very wealthy, he believed that it was his duty to help strengthen his "friends" – America's youth. The actor refused to license his name for products he viewed as unsuitable or dangerous, and he turned down personal appearances at which his "friends" would be charged admission.

Boyd appeared as Hopalong Cassidy on the cover of numerous national magazines, including the August 29, 1950 issue of *Look* and the November 27, 1950 issue of *Time*. On Thanksgiving in 1950, he led the Carolina's Carousel Parade in Charlotte, North Carolina and drew an estimated crowd of 500,000 persons, the largest in the parade's history.

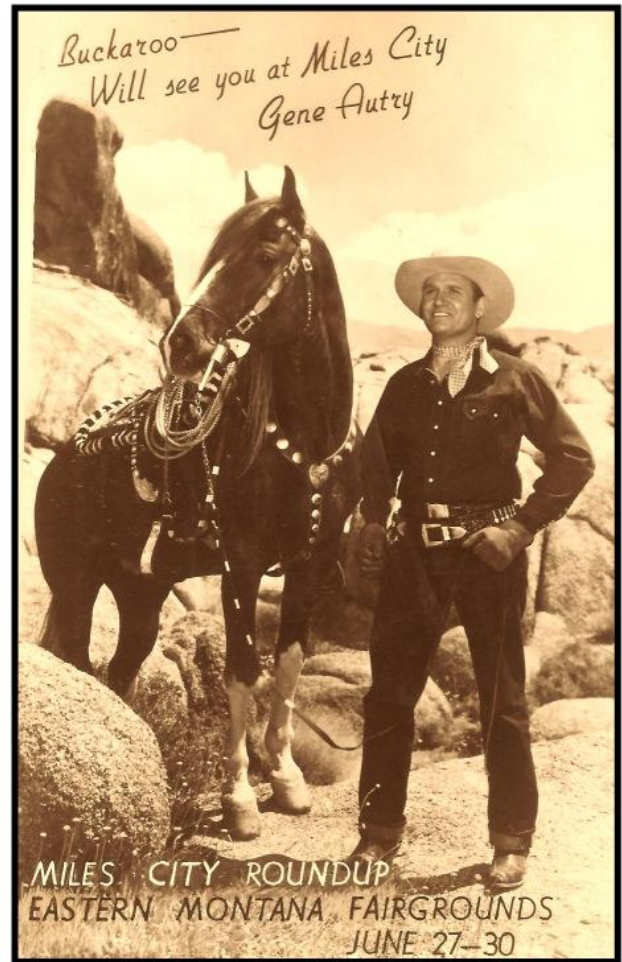
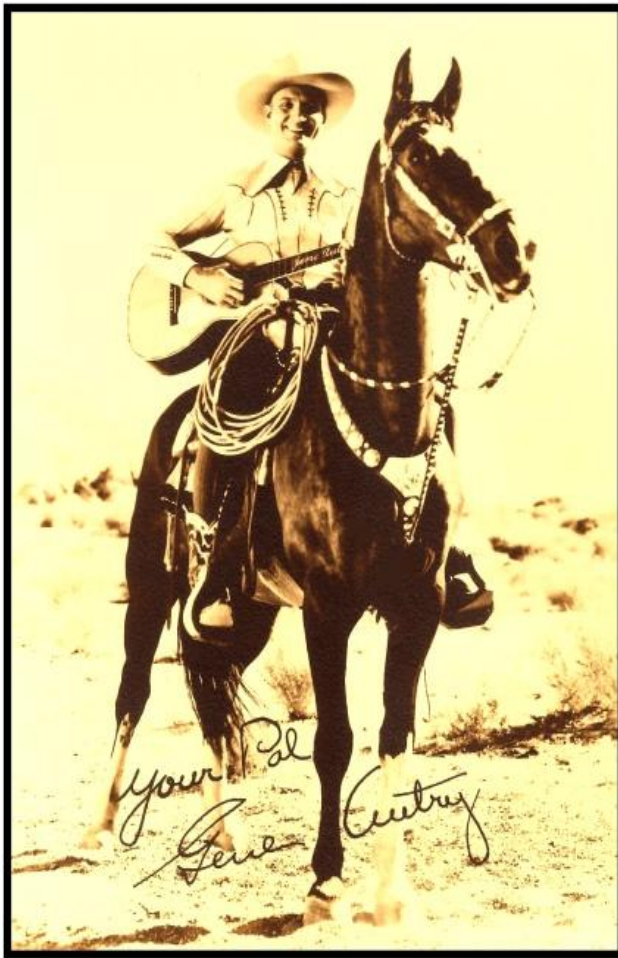


The following year, Boyd led the Grand Floral Parade as the Grand Marshal for Portland's Rose Festival in 1951 with his horse *Topper* (see cover photo). Boyd had a cameo as himself in Cecil B. DeMille's 1952 circus epic, *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

On May 26, 1951, an amusement park named Hoppyland opened in the Venice section of Los Angeles. This was an expansion and re-theming of Venice Lake Park (opened the previous year) after Boyd became an investor. Situated on some 80 acres, Hoppyland included a roller coaster, miniature railroads, pony rides, a boat ride, a Ferris wheel, a carousel and other thrill rides along with picnic grounds and recreational facilities. Despite Boyd's regular appearances as Hoppy, the park was not successful and it closed in 1954.

Boyd retired in 1954 and passed away September 12, 1972 from complications of Parkinson's disease and heart failure.

William Boyd and his 1942 Chrysler Town and Country station wagon.



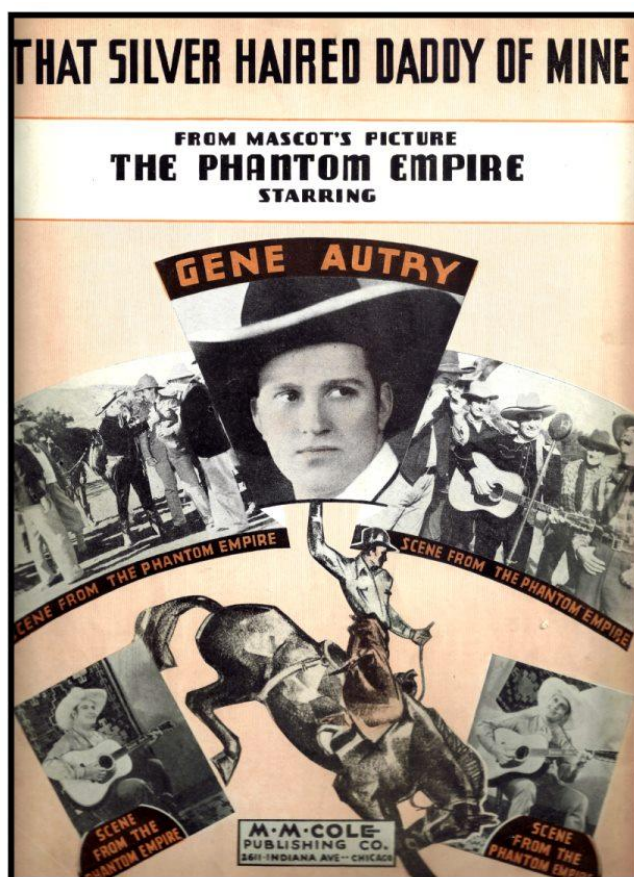
Orvon Grover Autry was born September 29, 1907 in North Texas, the grandson of a Methodist preacher. Autry became an American performer who gained fame as a singing cowboy on the radio, in movies and on television for more than three decades beginning in the early 1930's. Autry was also owner of a television station, several radio stations including Portland's KEX. He also owned the Anaheim Angels Major League Baseball team from 1961 to 1997.

From 1934 to 1953, Autry appeared in 93 films and 91 episodes of The Gene Autry Show television series. During the 1930's and 1940's, he personified the straight-shooting hero—honest, brave, and true—and profoundly touched the lives of millions of Americans. Autry was also one of the most important figures in the history of country music. His singing cowboy movies were the first vehicle to carry country music to a national audience. Autry is still remembered for his Christmas holiday songs.

Autry is a member of both the Country Music Hall of Fame and Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, and he is the only person to be awarded stars in all five categories on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, for film, television, music, radio, and live performance. The town of Gene Autry, Oklahoma was named in his honor.

In the 1920's, Gene Autry moved with his family to Oklahoma where he worked on his father's ranch while at school. After leaving high school in 1925, Autry worked as a telegrapher for the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway. His talent at singing and playing guitar led him to perform at local dances.





While working as a telegrapher, Autry would sing and accompany himself on the guitar to pass the lonely hours, especially when he had the midnight shift. This later got him sacked. One night, he was encouraged to sing professionally by a customer, the famous humorist Will Rogers, who had heard Autry singing.

As soon as he could collect money to travel, he went to New York. He auditioned for Victor Records, about the time it became RCA Victor (1928). According to Nathaniel Shilkret, director of Light Music for Victor at the time, Autry asked to speak to Shilkret when Autry found that he had been turned down. Shilkret explained to Autry that he was turned down not because of his voice, but because Victor had just made contracts with two similar singers. Autry left with a letter of introduction from Shilkret and the advice to sing on radio to gain experience and to come back in a year or two. In 1928, Autry was singing on Tulsa's radio station KVOO as "Oklahoma's Yodeling Cowboy," and the Victor Archives show on October 9, 1929.

Autry signed a recording deal with Columbia Records in 1929. He worked in Chicago on the WLS-AM radio show *National Barn Dance* for four years, and with his own show, where he met singer-songwriter Smiley Burnette. In his early recording career, Autry covered various genres, including a labor song, "The Death of Mother Jones", in 1931.

Autry also recorded many hillbilly-style records in 1930 and 1931 in New York City, which were certainly different in style and content from his later recordings. His first hit was in 1932 with "That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine," a duet with fellow railroad man, Jimmy Long, which Autry and Long co-wrote.

Autry also sang the classic Ray Whitley hit "Back in the Saddle Again," as well as many Christmas holiday songs, including "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," his own composition "Here Comes Santa Claus," "Frosty the Snowman," and his biggest hit, "Rudolph the Red-

Nosed Reindeer." He wrote "Here Comes Santa Claus" after being the Grand Marshal of the 1946 Santa Claus Lane Parade (Now the Hollywood Christmas Parade). He heard all of the spectators watching the parade saying "Here comes Santa Claus!" virtually handing him the title for his song. He recorded his version of the song in 1947 and it became an instant classic.

Autry was the original owner of Challenge Records. The label's biggest hit was "Tequila" by The Champs in 1958, which started the rock-and-roll instrumental craze of the late 1950's and early 1960's. He sold the label soon after that.

Autry made 640 recordings, including more than 300 songs written or co-written by himself. His records sold more than 100 million copies and he has more than a dozen gold and platinum records, including the first record ever certified gold.

Discovered by film producer Nat Levine in 1934, Autry and Burnette made their film debut for Mascot Pictures Corporation in *In Old Santa Fe* as part of a singing cowboy quartet; he was then given the starring role by Levine in 1935 in the 12-part serial *The Phantom Empire*. Shortly thereafter, Mascot was absorbed by the newly formed Republic Pictures Corporation and Autry went along to make 44 more films up to 1940, all B-westerns in which he played under his own name, rode his horse, Champion, had Burnette as his regular sidekick, and had many opportunities to sing in each film. Pat Buttram was picked by Gene Autry, recently returned from his World War II service in the United States Army Air Force, to work with him. Buttram would co-star with Gene Autry in more than 40 films and in over 100 episodes of Autry's television show.

During World War II, Autry enlisted in the United States Army in 1942, and became a tech sergeant in the United States Army Air Corps. Holding a private pilot's license, he was determined to become a military pilot and earned his service pilot rating in June 1944.

Few are aware of Autry's longtime involvement in professional rodeo. In 1942, at the height of his screen popularity, Autry had a string of rodeo stock based in Ardmore, Oklahoma. A year later, he became a partner in the World Championship Rodeo Company, which furnished livestock for many of the country's major rodeos.

In 1954, he acquired Montana's top bucking string from the estate of Leo J. Cremer, Sr., and put Canadian saddle bronc riding champion Harry Knight in charge of the operation. A merger with the World Championship Rodeo Company in 1956 made Autry the sole owner. He moved the entire company to a 24,000-acre ranch near Fowler, Colorado, with Knight as the working partner in the operation. For the next 12 years, they provided livestock for most of the major rodeos in Texas, Colorado, Montana, and Nebraska. When the company was sold in 1968, both men continued to be active in rodeo. For his work as a livestock contractor, Autry was inducted into the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association's Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1979.

Gene Autry was the first of the singing cowboys in films, but was succeeded as the top star by Roy Rogers while Autry served in the AAF during World War II. He briefly returned to Republic to finish out his contract, which had been suspended for the duration of his military service and which he had tried to have declared void after his discharge. He appeared in 1951 in the film *Texans Never Cry*. After 1951, Autry formed his own production company to make Westerns under his own control, which continued the 1947 distribution agreement with Columbia Pictures.



Autry purchased the 110-acre Monogram Movie Ranch in 1953, in Placerita Canyon near Newhall, California, in the northern San Gabriel Mountains foothills. He renamed it the Melody Ranch after his movie of the same name.

Autry then sold 98 acres of the property, most of the original ranch. The western town, adobes, and ranch cabin sets and open land for location shooting were retained as a movie ranch on 12 acres. Numerous "B" Westerns and TV shows were shot there during Autry's ownership, including the initial years of *Gunsmoke* with James Arness.

A decade after he purchased Melody Ranch, a brushfire swept through in August 1962, destroying most of the original standing sets, dashing Autry's plans to turn it into a museum. However, the devastated landscape did prove useful for productions such as *Combat*. A complete adobe ranch survived at the northeast section of the ranch. According to a published story by Autry, the fire caused him to turn his attention to Griffith Park, where he would build his Museum of Western Heritage (now known as the Autry National Center).

In 1990, after his favorite horse Champion, which lived in retirement there, died, Autry put the remaining 12-acre ranch up for sale. Melody Ranch came back to life after 1991, when it was purchased by the Veluzat family and rebuilt. It is now known as the Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio and Melody Ranch Studios and it survives as a movie location today, as well as the home of the City of Santa Clarita's annual Cowboy Festival, where Autry's legacy takes center stage. Melody Ranch Museum is open year-round; and one weekend a year, the entire ranch is open to the public during the Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival, another legacy of Autry's multiple talents.

From 1940 to 1956, Autry had a huge hit with a weekly show on CBS Radio, *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*. Champion, also had a CBS-TV and Mutual radio series, *The Adventures of Champion*. Beginning in 1950, he produced and starred in his own television show on CBS through his Flying A Productions studio and made several appearances on ABC TV's *Jubilee USA* in the late 1950s.

Autry retired from show business in 1964, having made almost 100 films and over 600 records. Gene Autry died of lymphoma on October 2, 1998, at the age of 91 at his home in Studio City, California.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Western history is very rich and full of color. Many people were involved in the music and acting in western movies, radio and television shows. This subject is too immense to cover in just one issue so watch for more installments in future issues of The Webfooter. The idea for this story was conceived over two years ago and it has taken a lot of time and research to pull it together. Thanks to Robert Insley for creating our Western Webster. Thanks to radio and television historian Craig Adams for helping with research. Thanks to Steve Kenney for providing the cover photo and thanks to Tracy Brown for digitally restoring the photo.

