

Gene Autry: 1907-1998



[From Gene Autry's autobiography...]

I was born in a little Texas town, Tioga, on September 29, 1907. About the same time I started walking, I began to ride a horse, and it wasn't very long after that when I began to plunk on a guitar.

My folks moved to Ravia, Oklahoma, when I was about 15, and that's where I finished high school. During off hours I worked around the Frisco Railroad station, doing odd jobs. In return for this, the station master taught me telegraphy. I went to

work for the Frisco, as a telegrapher, after graduating from high school. When the wires weren't too busy, I'd play my guitar and sing. In Sapulpa, Oklahoma, I met another railroad man who liked to sing, and we formed a team. We played at dances and parties around Sapulpa, and wrote a lot of songs together. Our first was "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine". In 1929 I went to New York, to try to get an audition with the Victor Recording Company. They listened to me, all right, and then told me to go back to Oklahoma, for some experience. I came back to Tulsa, and started singing on KVOO. They called me Oklahoma's Yodeling Cowboy.

A year later I went back to New York, and went to work for the Columbia Recording Company. Art Satherley, vice-president of Columbia, then sent me over to WLS in Chicago for a try out, and I wound up staying for four years. It was fun singing on the Sears Roebuck program, the Farm and Home Hour, the National Barndance, and the other programs.

In 1934, Mr. Herbert Yates, who owns Republic Studios, was looking for a singing cowboy to put in pictures. He chose me. I came out here to Hollywood that year, and have been here ever since. In that time I've made 52 pictures, and in 1940 Mr. Wrigley put me on the air for Doublemint Gum. My program is called Melody Ranch, and you can hear it on Sunday afternoons. I also have a rodeo now, which I hope you like. We call it the Gene Autry Flying "A" Ranch Rodeo. Soon after it started, a town in Oklahoma, near where I was born, and where I keep the rodeo during the winter, changed its name from Berwny, to Gene Autry, Oklahoma. This was one of the finest tributes I've ever had, and I'll always be proud of it.

The thing that struck me about Gene Autry, Oklahoma, is that we're might lucky to be living in a country where they change the map to honor a cowboy -- instead of to satisfy the greed of a dictator.

Thank you and I'll be seeing you.

Your Pal,

GENE AUTRY

