

Texas Personalities

Gene Autry

Born in Tioga, Texas on September 29, 1907, Gene Autry was raised in Texas and Oklahoma. Discovered by humorist Will Rogers, in 1929 Autry was billed as “Oklahoma’s Yodeling Cowboy” at KVOO in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He gained a popular following, a recording contract with Columbia Records in 1929, and soon after, performed on the “National Barn Dance” for radio station WLS in Chicago. Autry first appeared on screen in 1934 and up to 1953 popularized the musical Western and starred in 93 feature films. In 1940 theater exhibitors of America voted Autry the fourth biggest box office attraction, behind Mickey Rooney, Clark Gable, and Spencer Tracy. Autry made 635 recordings, including more than 300 songs written or co-written by him. 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. His Christmas and children’s records *Here Comes Santa Claus* and *Peter Cottontail* are among his platinum recordings. *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, the second all-time best selling Christmas single, boasts in excess of 30 million in sales.

From 1940 to 1956 the public listened to him on Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch radio show that was heard weekly over the CBS Radio Network, featuring Autry’s trademark theme song *Back In The Saddle Again*. The first performer to sell out Madison Square Garden, his concert and rodeo appearances throughout the United States and Europe are legendary and served as a model for other performers. He joined the Army Air Corps in 1942 and became Sgt. Gene Autry, ferrying fuel, ammunition, and arms in the China-India-Burma theater of war. When the war ended Autry was reassigned to Special Services, where he toured with a USO troupe in the South Pacific before resuming his movie career in 1946.

In 1950, Autry became the first major movie star to use the television medium, producing 91 half-hour episodes of *The Gene Autry Show* for CBS Television. This success lead him to produce a variety of other shows, as well. Autry’s great love for baseball prompted him to acquire the California Angels in 1961. Active in Major League Baseball, Autry held the title of Vice President of the American League until his death. Autry is the only entertainer to have five stars on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame, one each for radio, records, movies, television, and live performance including rodeo and theater appearances.



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