



Local Talents Entertain the Troops

Peggy Lee Joins the USO Tours with Benny Goodman Orchestra

Originally from Wimbledon, Norma Deloris Egstrom - aka Peggy Lee - got her big break singing at KOVC in Valley City. This led to other singing jobs that eventually landed her with a gig as the star singer for Benny Goodman and his Orchestra from 1941 to 1943. It wasn't long after that she was dubbed 'Queen of the Airwaves.'

When WWII broke out, she and the Benny Goodman Band performed at various military camps and bases all over the United States as part of the USO tours. Her ensuing fame as a singer (coined by crooner Tony Bennett as 'the female Frank Sinatra'), song writer, and actress didn't stop her from flying out of Hollywood for a one-night guest performance in Jamestown for the first reunion of the North Dakota 164th Infantry following the war.



(Above) Norma Deloris Egstrom from Wimbledon transformed herself into national singing star Peggy Lee.

(Left) Peggy Lee takes part in a USO Tours photo shoot with star Bob Hope.

(Bottom of panel) Peggy Lee sings with the iconic Benny Goodman Orchestra.

Photos courtesy of
Peggy Lee Associates, LLC



The Clark Sisters: (l-r) Mary, Peggy, Jean and Ann. (Left) An article from the Grand Forks Herald lauds their success.

Clark Sisters Prove Hit With Ft. Bragg Men

It took the combined efforts of Hitler and the U. S. army to acquaint many Grand Forks boys now at Fort Bragg, N. C., with the Clark Sisters, according to a letter from Paratrooper James Juneau.

Juneau writes, "At a USO camp show put on here the other night, the hit of the entire evening was an act of singers, the Clark Sisters. Boy, the crowd of men made more noise and clapped longer and louder for them than for all the rest of the acts together."

A number of men in the audience were from Grand Forks, and although they had heard the Clark Sisters over the air back home, and knew they were from the same home town, most of them had never seen them in person until they appeared at the camp, Juneau says.

Valley City's Clark Sisters Tour with the Tommy Dorsey Band

The Clark Sisters were the granddaughters of former Valley City resident and bandleader, D.W. Clark. Jean, Ann, and Peggy were born and raised in Valley City while Mary, the youngest, was born in Grand Forks. They joined the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in early 1943; Dorsey renamed them "the Sentimentalists." The quartet toured with the Dorsey Band as part of the USO Tours, performing at military bases and camps throughout the United States.

After Jean's marriage in 1948, the remaining members formed a trio and had intermittent success, even having their own 'Bob Hope' moment when they backed Hope on his "Buttons and Bows" song from the movie of the same name.

Jeanette Westergaard Mahoney - Gag Writer

Jeanette Westergaard grew up in the local farmlands, granddaughter of one of the original settlers, Andrew Wedin, who brought his family to Barnes County in 1879. Her father, William Westergaard, served a term as mayor of Valley City.

Jeanette moved to Hollywood and became the wife of Wilkie Mahoney; they would form a script writing team working for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. She also was a gag writer for Red Skelton and Bob Hope which led to her contributions to the USO Tours. Jeanette was a favorite of service men, and was once elected honorary Colonel of the 369th Regiment serving in the Pacific Theatre.

Jeanette Westergaard would become one of Hollywood's civic and social leaders, active in a number of interracial organizations on the West Coast.



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