

Vaughn DeLeath, Was First Lady of Radio

Ashes of Famous Singing Star Buried In Local Cemetery

Vaughn De Leath passed from this life on Thursday, May 27, 1943, in the Hotel Statler, Buffalo, N. Y., from a heart complication.

Her sister, Mrs. Alma Cunningham of Los Angeles, Calif., was visiting with her at the time of her death, and later brought her ashes back to be interred in the Mount Pulaski Cemetery.

The following obituary appeared in the Mount Pulaski Times-News:

Born in Mount Pulaski

Leonore Vonderlieth was born in Mount Pulaski, Sept. 26, 1894, a daughter of George W. and Katie Miller Vonderlieth. Her father died 42 years ago, and at the age of 12 Leonore moved with her mother, and sister Alma, to Los Angeles, Calif., where she attended school and made a special study of music. Leaving the Pacific Coast almost 25 years ago she went to New York City to continue her music career, and also her work as a composer. She was credited with composing almost 500 songs.

While attending Mills College in San Francisco, she greatly surprised her instructor with a three-range voice, from contralto to soprano, and they had permitted her to develop it. This fact later proved to make her internationally famous in the radio world under the professional name of Vaughn De Leath. In New York City in 1920 her great opportunity came when she was making phonograph records. Dr. Lee DeForest invited her to sing over his wireless telephone station at 40th Street & Broadway. There was no piano or other musical instrument in the studio in the Old World Tower building in downtown Manhattan when she stepped to the microphone to sing "Swanee River," and it was then that she became known as the first woman whose singing voice was heard on the air. The early radio enthusiasts, listening by earphones at their crude crystal sets, to Dr. DeForest's experimental broadcasts, were enchanted and from that day her popularity continued to grow, as broadcasting developed.

Singing into the imperfect microphones of radio, she was compelled to use soft, dulcet tones, lest a high note shatter a transmitter tube. Thus she was credited with originating the "crooning" type of singing. She continued in the radio field up to within a few days of her death.

She was always referred to as the "Original Radio Girl," and has left her name implanted in the history of radio, one of the world's great inventions. Although internationally known as Vaughn De Leath, in her home city of Mount Pulaski, she was affectionately known as Leonore Vonderlieth by all her friends and former schoolmates.

Refrigerator of Vaughn De Leath Sells For \$1,130

(August 5, 1943)

Any mention in news dispatches concerning the late Vaughn De Leath is always of interest to the people of Mount Pulaski, her old home town. A story sent out July 27, 1943, from Bridgeport, Conn., reads as follows:

"Bidding was slow Tuesday at the auction to settle the estate of Vaughn De Leath, 'first lady of radio,' who lived in Easton, until the electric refrigerator came to the block. Then housewives, stymied by war restrictions on making new refrigerators, excitedly bid up the price to \$1,130 — for a refrigerator with a ceiling price of \$69.00. Mrs. William T. Rock got it at \$1,130, of which \$69.00 is to go to the estate and the rest into war bonds and stamps."

Money brings acquaintances, but loyalty holds friends.

One Of The Pioneers In The Early Days Of The Radio



"HOMECOMING", REMINISCENT OF FAMOUS NATIVE DAUGHTER

Wrote Special Article For Times-News After Visit Here In 1951.

By A Native Daughter

Mount Pulaski, the locale of my ignominious debut! Still I was only 3 years old and when the burnt cork was removed from my butter-ball face, I was found to have a nice case of measles! So I hope I shall have been forgiven. Perhaps I have been, but the story and a great amount of teasing linger on.

There is a saying that nothing remains the same: that everything changes continually. I should like that amended to read, "almost everything". On my recent trip back to the Mount I found many things had changed while other familiar landmarks remained the same. I was a very little girl when I left there, almost too young to remember, and yet return visits as a youngster have helped to retain certain fond memories, so that this last time I could still recall remembrances of my childhood.

But what has become of Old Settlers' day? The bandstand in the park? The post office in the square? Scroggin's Opera House? The Scroggin and Jenner Hotels? Some of them have gone forever, as you residents well know, while some of them have blossomed anew like a rose emerging from

a bud. Our Lincoln Shrine certainly will be a worthy commemoration to a great man and no one will miss the post office then. The Jenner Hotel no doubt is far more decorative and useful as The Times-News office and apartments.

But, what has become of the band concerts? Radio may replace these, but can it compensate the loss of them? As I recall it those were magic Wednesday nights when friends from far and near gathered in the old square and friendly nods and handclaps and conversations gladdened the week. Many of those friendly faces are seen no more. Among them my beloved mother's and father's. What can compensate this loss? Alas! nothing. However, the Yankee Wind Mill and the C. F. Schafer Hardware Company in both of which my father was a partner, seem to go on forever.

Of special interest to me, too, is that post office box, a picture of which your editor so kindly printed in a recent issue of the Times-News Pictorial. Remember? It once belonged to Abraham Lincoln (Springfield No. 3432) and when these boxes were transferred to Mount Pulaski, this particular box was assigned by S. Linn Beidler, postmaster at that time, to the Wind Mill Company and consequently was used by my father, George W. (W. for Washington), as he was

born on July 4) von der Lieth, and his brother Adolph. I believe when the post office was dismantled Mr. Obermiller gave the box to my cousins Henry and Walter, and they in turn presented it to the Lincoln Shrine where it now reposes. So much for that. This changing world marches on but some Logan county specialties remain the same. Whether it be due to the quality of the cream and milk, or the cunning of the hand that fashioned it Logan County Ice Cream is second to none: I have eaten ice cream in many parts of the world, but Berton's has that same deliciousness that I remember so well in that frozen delicacy made in our family. It was good to see old faces and places, and best of all to see some of my "kinfolks," as Bob Burns would say. They, too, have distinguished themselves by certain hobbies and pursuits. I suppose many of you are familiar with their activities - my cousin Grace's (Mrs. Ottmar Wagner) collection of crystal and glass, my cousin Walter's (Schafer) unusual assortment of clocks, and cousin Annie's (Schafer) varied needlepoint; cousin Albert's boy Frederick's (Lipp) collection of guns, and his wife Bertha's superlative needlepoint portrait. (That is something you must see some day when you are over that way.)

Mr. Wible asked me to make a few notes on my visit here, but he did not invite me to consume a whole page. Of course my reminiscences could go on and on,

but paper and ink are getting scarcer (not just my supply—but the government is asking us to conserve you know) and besides if you have read this far you have done very well.

I hope that sometime we shall meet again. Who knows? Out of all the world I may choose the place of my birth as a haven to retire to. (If indeed I ever do retire!)

One reporter seized upon the idea that "since my father was in the windmill business I had been air-minded since birth! Uncle Sam has a slogan 'Keep 'em flying.' So, dedicated to the Yankee Wind Mill, I shall paraphrase it by saying, 'Keep 'Em Turning'."

With love and best wishes to all Mount Pulaskians, native or adopted, known or unknown, I remain,

Your First Lady of Radio,
Vaughn De Leath.

christened Leonore von der Lieth.

Vaughn DeLeath Listed In ASCAP Biographical

The following was taken from the ASCAP Biographical Dictionary of Authors, Composers and Publishers relative to Vaughn De Leath:

De Leath, Vaughn, composer, author, pianist, singer, actress, radio and recording artist; born, Mount Pulaski, Ill., Sept. 26, 1894; died in Buffalo, N.Y., May 28, 1943. ASCAP 1923. She was educated at the Pomona High School at Pomona, Calif.; and two years at Mills College, Calif. She began writing songs at 11 years of age and in 1912, her first two compositions, "Glenwood Waltzes" and "In The Twilight," were published. She was a concert singer in her early teens.

In January, 1920, in New York, she was the first American woman to give a broadcasting program, under direction of Lee DeForest, in the New York World Tower Building. She was manager-director and chief entertainer in the New York Radio Station WDT.

Her acting engagements included the role of prima donna the Lionel Barrymore play, "Laugh, Clown, Laugh"; in vaudeville several years.

She was presented a scroll by Gov. Alred of Texas for writing "Blue Bonnets" for Texas Centennial Exposition; Honorable mention, Oklahoma — "Rangerettes." Songs: "Drive Safely," "Hi Yo Silver," "A Little Bit Of Sunshine," "At Eventide," "Blue Bonnets," "Bye Low," "Ducklings On Parade," "I Wasn't Lying When I Said I Love You," "If It Hadn't Been For You," "Love Is A Song," "My Lover Comes A-Riding," "Rosemary For Remembrance," "The Gingerbread Brigade," "The Madonna's Lullaby."

Publisher's Note: The book which was sent us by Mrs. Alma Cunningham, sister of the late Vaughn De Leath, has been placed in the Mount Pulaski Township Library in memory of the famous radio celebrity.

A great bluster was made in 1840 over the supposed center of the state 8 or 10 miles south of here, a new city was to be laid off and made the capital of Illinois. Nothing more than a name "Capital City" was accomplished.

The first cabin in the newly laid-out town of Mt. Pulaski, was built where the Beidler Drug Store. (The Aitchison Rexall Store now marks the spot.)

Beam & Rennis, Springfield, built in 1847, the courthouse, now a Lincoln Shrine. Henry W. Vonderlieth took the contract for laying the brick. A. E. Turley and Leonard Scroggin hauled the brick. Adolph Weckel was mortar-maker and hod-carrier. Dietrick Suedmeier and Henry Horn moulded the brick in Geo. W. Turley's brickyard.