

Vaughn DeLeath – “First Lady Of Radio”



Internationally famous radio singer back in the roaring 20's & on into the 30's, Leonora Elizabeth Vonderlieth, was born in Mt. Pulaski on September 26, 1894. She was the daughter of the local "Yankee Windmill" manufacturer, George Vonderlieth. Leonore made her stage debut in the old Mt. Pulaski Scroggin Opera House at the age of three (1897), but quickly left the stage crying. Removing the burnt cork makeup, her mother discovered she had Chicken Pox. At the age of 11, she started writing songs. At the age of 12, following the death of her father, she

moved with her mother, Catherine, & sister to southern California. She attended Pomona HS, where she wrote & sang her own compositions. She attended Mills College in San Francisco & surprised her instructor with her three-range voice from contralto to soprano. Transforming her surname into the stage moniker Vaughn DeLeath, she premiered on-stage in Los Angeles at the age of 17 & eventually made her way to New York City, where she became a household name. Her break into the radio music industry came as a result of her melodic "crooner" voice, which did not break the radio vacuum tubes. This delighted Dr. Lee DeForrest, who had invited her to sing at his new radio station.

This presented herself a chance to continue her singing career for over twenty years – basically ending during the Great Depression years. She became recognized as "The First Lady of Radio". Her crooning style of singing was later picked up by the likes of Bing Crosby, Rudy Vallee, Frank Sinatra & others. In fact, it's been reported that she taught Bing how to croon in front of the radio microphone. She performed over 15,000 songs on 2,000 broadcasts during the '20's. She routinely appeared on the Wrigley Show, "Voice of Firestone Radio Hour" & NBC Radio.

She also demonstrated a high level of instrumental ability on the ukulele & occasionally accompanied herself on recordings. Her 1925 hit recording "Ukulele Lady" was used in the 1999 film: *The Cider House Rules*. Another one of her hit songs was "Are You Lonesome Tonight". In 1960, her old hit achieved immortality when Elvis Presley made it one of his hit recordings. The illustration with her & Dr. DeForrest is by **Lloyd Ostendorf - 1971**. She wrote the lyrics & music for "Oliver Twist", starring Jackie Coogan. She has a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame. Vaughn died in 1943. Her remains are buried in the Mt. Pulaski Cemetery. Some of her old records, photos & much more information are on display in the MPTHS Museum. Her cousin, Henry Vonderlieth, together with his wife Jane, were the founders of the very comfortable & well-maintained Vonderlieth Living Center in Mt. Pulaski in 1973. This marvelous & affordable facility continues to serve Mt. Pulaski & Central Illinois. **Photo Credits & Information: MPTHS Museum**

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