

Hollywood Types From Illinois

by Tom Emery
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CENTRAL ILLINOIS NATIVE WON OSCAR IN 1950

For movie fans, the Academy Award carries a mystique like no other, and represents the pinnacle of cinema in any given year. Sixty-nine years ago, a central Illinois native took home an Oscar, a highlight in a lengthy movie career spent behind the scenes.

Marjorie Best, an acclaimed Hollywood costume designer who was born in Jacksonville on April 10, 1903, won an Oscar for her work on *The Adventures of Don Juan*, a 1948 film starring Errol Flynn and Raymond Burr.

Film critic Leonard Maltin referred to *The Adventures of Don Juan* in 2004 as a “handsome tongue-in-cheek swashbuckler” with Flynn playing the lead.

It was one of four Oscar nominations for Best Costume Design for Best, who was also mentioned for *Giant*, the winner of Best Picture in 1956. Best’s work was also recognized in 1960 for *Sunrise at Campobello*, which portrayed Franklin D. Roosevelt and starred Greer Garson, and in 1965 for *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, featuring an all-star cast including John Wayne, Charlton Heston, Sidney Poitier, and Claude Rains.

Best moved to Los Angeles following high school to attend the respected Chouinard Art Institute. She eventually worked for Warner Brothers and became known as one of the most talented artists in the studio’s costume department, specializing in men’s costumes and historical re-creations.

She is credited as costume designer on 44 movies, including *State Fair* (1962), *Rio Bravo* (1959), and *Life with Father* (1947). In addition, Best was also in the costume and wardrobe department of nineteen other movies, including *Distant Drums* (1951), *Along the Great Divide* (1951), and *The Charge at Feather River* (1953). She died on June 14, 1997 in Toluca Lake, Calif.



CENTRAL ILLINOIS MAN ANNOUNCED FOR BING CROSBY Played in 1939 Oscar-Winning *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Most of those honored on the Hollywood Walk of Fame earned their star on their acting or singing ability. In the case of central Illinois native Ken Carpenter, his recognition came on his speaking voice alone.

Carpenter, who was born in Avon in Fulton County on Aug. 21, 1900, is remembered as the man who announced for the legendary Bing Crosby for 27 years. His work with Crosby is the highlight of an accomplished career in radio, television, and movies, mainly with his rich voice.

The son of a Universalist minister, Carpenter graduated from the now-defunct Lombard College in Galesburg in 1921, where he met his future wife. He left for Hollywood in 1929 and quickly landed a job with KFI radio, where he called USC and UCLA football games for the Pacific Coast and NBC Radio Networks from 1932-35.

He also announced the 1935 Rose Bowl between Alabama and Stanford for NBC and provided the color commentary for NBC original programming in Los Angeles from 1938-42, which also included the Rose Bowl. Carpenter considered the Rose Bowls “a big break for me, as they made me known to clients and advertising agencies in the East, so I had a jump on other local men when the big commercial shows started originating in L.A. in the mid-1930s.”

Sports would not be the only field of excellence for Carpenter. Starting in 1935, Carpenter was Crosby’s announcer for the radio variety show Kraft Music Hall. He remained until 1946, part of a 27-year affiliation with Crosby, who called him “the man with the golden voice.”

Carpenter’s pipes helped him secure roles in a variety of movies, including the 1939 Frank Capra hit Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, which won an Oscar for original story. The Oscar statuette was voiced by Carpenter in the 1954 comedy Susan Slept Here, which is believed to be the only film “narrated” by Oscar himself.

The smooth-talking Carpenter announced the NBC radio program The Halls of Ivy from 1950-52 and narrated Lux Radio Theater from 1952-55. He then followed with Lux Video Theater on television until 1957. From 1945-49, he was the voice of The Life of Riley on NBC Radio and was again with Crosby on CBS Radio from 1954-56. In 1946-49, he narrated Philco Radio Time on ABC Radio.

Carpenter is one of a handful of celebrities honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for Radio, a tribute found at 6706 Hollywood Boulevard. He died on Oct. 16, 1984, in Santa Monica following a brief illness.

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