

HATTIE MCDANIEL

When: 1895–1952

Where: Born in Kansas, lived in Fort Collins and Denver, Colorado, settled in California.

Why Important: McDaniel was the first African American to win an Academy Award. She won the award for Best Supporting Actress in 1940 for her role of "Mammy" in the movie *Gone with the Wind*.



Hattie McDaniel with her Oscar for Best Supporting Actress (*Gone With The Wind* 1939) and Fay Bainter who presented Hattie with her Oscar at the Academy Awards on Feb 29, 1940.

Hattie McDaniel as 'Mammy' in "*Gone With The Wind*" (1939)

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Hattie McDaniel was born in Wichita, Kansas. She was the youngest of thirteen children. McDaniel was born into a family of performers. She developed her talents and recited poetry, danced, and wrote songs. She also sang. McDaniel sang so much that her mother bribed her to stop!

In 1901 McDaniel's family moved to Denver. McDaniel insisted that she wanted to perform. She convinced her parents that she should quit school. McDaniel left East High School her sophomore year. She joined her father's traveling show. In the mid-1920s McDaniel got her first radio job. She performed on Denver's KOA radio station. McDaniel was one of the first African American women to perform on radio.

During the Depression, McDaniel moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was looking for work and got her big break at Club Madrid. McDaniel became a featured nightly act. Convinced that her talent could take her further, she moved to Hollywood to join a brother and two sisters in 1931. In Hollywood McDaniel found no shortage of work. In 1936 alone, she appeared in twelve films.

McDaniel earned the role of "Mammy" in *Gone with the Wind* over several rivals. Her salary for the movie was \$450 a week. McDaniel's award-winning performance was generally seen as a symbol of progress for African Americans.

McDaniel's success allowed her to buy a house in 1942. Unfortunately, she found herself in a legal battle to keep it. Los Angeles limited homeownership rights for African Americans at the time. McDaniel faced the possibility of losing her home. She was one of several black entertainers who challenged the racist system in court, and won.

Despite the fact that McDaniel did not live in Denver until she was six and left the city while still a teen, Denverites have always claimed her as their own. She died on October 2, 1952, and was the first African American buried in Los Angeles's Rosedale Cemetery.

Sources:

"Hattie McDaniel Biography." Encyclopedia of World Biography. <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Ma-Mo/McDaniel-Hattie.html>

"Hattie McDaniel." Red Hot Jazz. <http://www.redhotjazz.com/hattiemcd.html>

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Further Reading:

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