Hattie McDaniel

...and other Black actors noted

by Don Neal

This one-page exhibit features Hattie McDaniel and other actors with whom she appeared in films and who also have been honored on a U. S. postage stamp.

Hattie McDaniel was born in Wichita, Kansas, in 1895, the youngest of 13 children of two former slaves. Five years later, the family moved to Colorado, where she made her debut on the relatively new medium of radio. She is credited as being the first Black woman to sing on the radio, thanks to her gig at age 17 in Denver. She sometimes performed as "Hi-Hat Hattie" and continued singing and doing comedy on radio, in nightclubs, and in vaudeville. She came to Hollywood while in her 30s and appeared uncredited in several works. But the studios took notice with her small but fun role in 1933's *I'm No Angel*, playing one of Mae West's maids.

McDaniel was first mentioned in *Variety* on July 11, 1936 (using common terminology of the time): "Hattie McDaniel, colored comedienne, has been given a two-picture contract at Metro. She goes into *The Devil is a Sissy* and *Libeled Lady*. William Meiklejohn set the deal." That was the entire story. (Meiklejohn was her talent agent who later represented such stars as Lucille Ball, Ronald Reagan, and Nat King Cole.)

McDaniel's career marked a Hollywood breakthrough, but nearly every positive move was accompanied by a sobering footnote. Though she played a key role in one of the biggest Hollywood movies ever, she was not allowed to attend the Atlanta world premiere of *Gone With the Wind*. However, she did attend the Los Angeles premiere. She won her supporting actress Oscar for *GWTW* on February 29, 1940. The following day, *Variety* ran several front-page stories about the Academy Awards, and she was the only star to be singled out for a story. It said, "Miss McDaniel was given a great ovation when she entered the banquet hall, bedecked in orchids and flashing a smiling recognition of the tribute. Not only was she the first of her race to receive an award, but also she was the first Negro ever to sit at an Academy banquet." However, McDaniel and her escort were relegated to a segregated table.

Hattie McDaniel stands as an icon. Though some are critical of her roles, nobody disputes her great acting. When she won, she said tearfully, "Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, fellow members of the motion picture industry and honored guests: This is one of the happiest moments of my life, and I want to thank each one of you who had a part in selecting me for one of their awards, for your kindness. It has made me feel very, very humble; and I shall always hold it as a beacon for anything that I may be able to do in the future. I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry. My heart is too full to tell you just how I feel, and may I say thank you and God bless you."

Hattie McDaniel as Violet and Bette Davis as Maggie Patterson in *The Great Lie* (1941) and Sam McDaniel (as Jefferson). Sam is Hattie's real brother.

As Minerva Clay with Bette Davis as Stanley Timberlake Kingsmill in *In This Our Life* (1942) and Ernest Anderson (as Parry Clay)

Hattie McDaniel as woman in apartment house (uncredited) with Zasu Pitts as Millie in *Hello, Sister* (1933)

Hattie McDaniel as Hilda with Henry Fonda (as Peter Ames) in *The Mad Miss Manton* (1938)

As Cleota with Henry Fonda (as Tommy Turner) in *The Male Animal* (1942)

Hattie McDaniel as Mom Beck with Lionel Barrymore in *The Little Colonel* (1935)

As Rosetta in *Saratoga* (1937)*

As Fidelia in *Since You Went Away* (1944)**

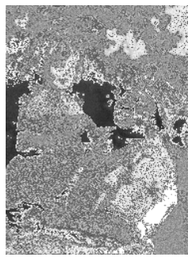
Hattie McDaniel as Ella with John Barrymore as Charley Jasper in *True Confession* (1937)

Hattie McDaniel (June 10, 1895 - October 26, 1952) was an American actress, singer-songwriter, and comedienne. For her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), she won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, becoming the first Black American to win an Oscar. She has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1975, and in 2006 became the first (and only) Black Oscar winner to be honored with a U. S. postage stamp (issued January 25, 2006).

Hattie McDaniel as Aida with James Cagney as Tom Richards in *Johnny Come Lately* (1943) and Clarence Muse as Dougherty's butler.

In *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (1943), many stars performed as themselves in musical numbers, including Bette Davis, Dinah Shore, and Humphrey Bogart. Hattie McDaniel played the gossip in the "Ice Cold Katie" number.

Hattie McDaniel as Malena with Katharine Hepburn as the title character in *Alice Adams* (1935)



Hattie McDaniel as Becky "Mom Beck" Porter with Shirley Temple as Lloyd Sherman and Lionel Barrymore as Colonel Lloyd in *The Little Colonel* (1935) and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson (as Walker, Colonel Lloyd's butler), Avonnie Jackson (as May Lily), Geneva Williams (as Maria), and Nyanza Potts (as Henry Clay)

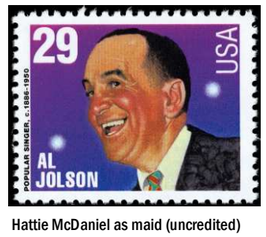
**Also as Fidelia with Shirley Temple and Lionel Barrymore in *Since You Went Away* (1944) with Dorothy Dandridge (as Black officer's wife in railway station) and Butterfly McQueen (as WAC Sergeant, deleted scene)

Hattie McDaniel as Hester, the Fullers' maid , with Jack Benny as Bill Fuller and Ann Sheridan as Connie Fuller in *George Washington Slept Here* (1942) and Dudley Dickerson (as Sam, uncredited)

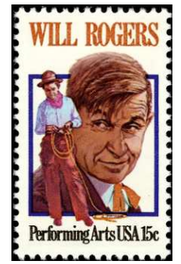
Hattie McDaniel as Dehlia with Oliver Hardy as Dr. Tibbett in *Zenobia* (1939) and Stepin Fetchit (as Zero), Philip Hurlic (as Zeke), and The Hall Johnson Choir. Stan Laurel did not appear in this film.

Hattie McDaniel as Isabella, the cook, with Bela Lugosi ... dual roles as Dr. Arthur Perry and as Edwin Perry in *Murder by Television* (1935)

As Deborah, the maid, with Bela Lugosi as Gregory Benez in *Postal Inspector* (1936)



Hattie McDaniel as maid (uncredited) with Al Jolson as Al Jackson in *The Singing Kid* (1936) with Cab Calloway as Cotton Club Band Leader, and His Cotton Club Orchestra



Hattie McDaniel as Aunt Dilsey with Will Rogers as Judge William "Billy" Priest in *Judge Priest* (1934) with Stepin Fetchit (as Jeff Poindexter)

Hattie McDaniel as Hanna (uncredited) with James Stewart as Christopher Tyler in *Next Time We Love* (1936)

As Martha with James Stewart as Bill Pettigrew in *The Shopworn Angel* (1938)

As a maid (uncredited) with James Stewart as Prof. Peter Morgan, Jr. in *Vivacious Lady* (1938)

Hattie McDaniel as Queenie and Paul Robeson as Joe in *Show Boat* (1936) with Clarence Muse (as Janitor) and Eddie "Rochester" Anderson (as young Black man, uncredited)

Hattie McDaniel as Mammy with Clark Gable as Rhett Butler and Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and house servants Oscar Polk (as Pork) and Butterfly McQueen (as Prissy) and, in the fields, Everett Brown (as Big Sam, the foreman)

As Isabel McCarthy (uncredited) with Clark Gable as Captain Alan Gaskell in *China Seas* (1935)

*As Rosetta with Clark Gable as Duke Bradley and Lionel Barrymore as Grandpa Clayton in *Saratoga* (1937)

Hattie McDaniel as Cora, Helen's maid (uncredited), with Marlene Dietrich as Helen Faraday, the title character, and Cary Grant as Nick Townsend in *Blonde Venus* (1932) with Charles R. Moore (as bartender, uncredited)

As Tira's (Mae West) manicurist (uncredited) with Cary Grant as Jack Clayton in *I'm No Angel* (1933) with Gertrude Howard as Beulah Thorndyke, Tira's main maid, and Libby Taylor as Libby, Tira's hairdressing maid