

The Radio Career of Gomer Cool Ryan Ellett

Gomer Cool was born April 20, 1908 in Nevada, MO, to Frederick and Martha Cool. Both of Cool's grandfathers had been blacksmiths and his father was a candy maker. Later in life he was called to be the pastor of a church in Atchison, KS. As a child Gomer worked in his father's candy store and, around the same time, began taking violin lessons. Both of these experiences would guide his career decisions years down the road.

Cool recalled that his first musical job was accompanying silent films at the local theater in the 1920s. Playing a double-bill every night he managed to save enough money to begin studies at the Kansas City Horner-Conservatory under the guidance of Sir Carl Busch, a Danish-born musician. In 1929, after an audition which he admitted was "less than sensational," Cool landed his first full-time job with KMBC, a small Kansas City radio station run by Arthur B. Church. As with many early radio professions, he did it all: singing, acting, fiddling, and writing.

The next year, 1930, Cool joined with three other KMBC employees to form a cowboy quartet called the Texas Rangers. Within another year or so the original four joined with a four-piece western band to form an eight-man Texas Rangers ensemble. The group numbered at least eight singers and musicians (the membership of which changed over the years) until 1949 when financial difficulties would force them to downsize. Little did Cool know this act would entertain America for the next two decades. The Texas Rangers sang and acted in skits over the station and toured around the region to perform.

While Robert Crawford became the musical leader of the act, Cool's contributions as a writer were no less important. He wrote continuity for the Rangers' various programs which were picked up by the CBS network as early as 1932. He also authored *The Red Horse Ranch*, a daily cowboy musical serial produced by KMBC and recorded at the World Broadcasting studios in 1934. A total of 65 episodes were recorded (26 of which have recently been discovered) and sold to stations primarily in the Midwest.

Red Horse Ranch was not especially profitable for Church and KMBC and it is only known to have aired for a year or so. The program's lackluster showing did not hamper the Rangers and they continued broadcasting and touring through the rest of the 1930s. In 1939 the group was hired as the background band for Gene Autry in his film *Colorado Sunset*. The Texas Rangers, usually billed in movies as either the KMBC-Texas Rangers or CBS-Texas Rangers, appeared in seven more western musicals before World War II. Unfortunately, the motion picture exposure didn't thrust the members into stardom as they'd hoped.

With the onset of the war the Rangers slowly dissolved. Gomer, now settled in Los Angeles, left the employ of Arthur Church and station KMBC in the early 1940s. For the next several years Cool worked as a writer and eventually worked his way on to some network series. In 1947 he wrote an episode of *Hawk Larabee*, a series on which his former band, the Texas Rangers, provided music initially. Cool's most notably writing gig came on the series *Rocky Jordan* which he wrote from 1948 to 1950. He is also credited with penning a 1952 series *Armchair Adventures* and, the same year, an episode of *The Whistler*.

During Cool's Hollywood years he was elected president of the Radio Writers Guild and, in 1956, second vice-president of the Writers Guild of America, West. He was an active writer through the 1950s. Upon retiring, Gomer and his wife Margaret moved to Santa Barbara and opened a candy store called Cool's Candies. This new career, a dramatic change from that of Los Angeles writer, lasted fifteen years.

Gomer, who has long been identified as the inspiration for Gomer Pyle's first name, currently resides in California.

Thanks to Gomer and Steve Cool for their assistance in researching the careers of Gomer Cool and the

Texas Rangers.