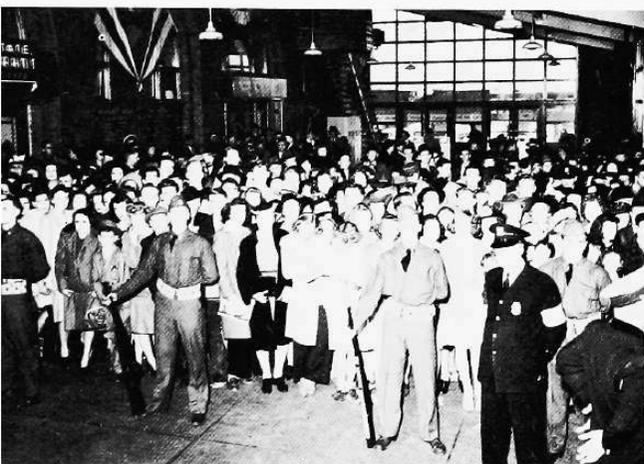


When Stars “Fell” On Minnesota



“CARGO” aboard a railroad wagon after arriving in Minneapolis were (from left, front row) Charlotte Greenwood, Joan Bennett, Joan Blondell, Claudette Colbert, Charles Boyer, Cary Grant, and Pat O’Brien. In back (from left) were Eleanor Powell, Bert Lahr, Ray Middleton (partly hidden), Frank McHugh, Groucho Marx (sans mustache), Risë Stevens, Desi Arnaz, Stan Laurel, and Oliver Hardy.

WELCOMING the stars at Milwaukee Station was this crowd, held back by soldiers and policemen.

“IT’S LIKE a front seat at all the motion picture theaters in the country at once.” Thus James McClellan of Temple City, California, described his job as conductor of the ten-car special train that carried some twenty-two top film stars and eight starlets of the Hollywood Victory Caravan into Minneapolis’ Milwaukee Station on Friday, May 8, 1942.¹ Comprising one of the largest groups of movie and radio celebrities ever to appear together for shows in the Twin Cities, the caravan was on a three-week, coast-to-coast tour of thirteen cities to raise army and navy relief funds during World War II.

Thousands of people crowded outside the depot for a “front seat” of sorts from which to view the arriving stars. And no wonder. The attraction was a veritable who’s who of Hollywood: Bing Crosby, Cary Grant, Charles Boyer, Claudette Colbert, Olivia De Havilland, Joan Bennett, Merle Oberon, James Cagney, Pat O’Brien, Joan Blondell, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Bert Lahr, Groucho Marx, Frank McHugh, Eleanor Powell, Risë

Stevens, Desi Arnaz, Frances Langford, and Charlotte Greenwood, among others. Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna had arrived earlier by plane.

Amidst crowds everywhere, the stars were whisked by bus along Washington Avenue to the Nicollet Hotel, their headquarters during their stay in the Twin Cities. Friday night was a night off for the stars. As reported in the extensive press coverage of the caravan, some went to a movie on Friday, others “held court” in hotel suites, and Hope and Colonna surprised (and delighted) a West High School audience by interrupting a class play for ten minutes of jokes, songs, and ad libs.

On Saturday morning Hope and Crosby played a match at Midland Hills Golf Club and greatly amused a

¹*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, May 11, 1942, p. 16 (quote). This account is based on newspaper stories in both Minneapolis and St. Paul for May 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1942. Numerous stories chronicled all aspects of the visit.

BING CROSBY waved to the crowd from the Twin City Lines bus that took the stars from the station to the Nicollet Hotel.



JOAN BLONDELL made an entry in the log book the stars kept during the tour. Frank McHugh (left) and Pat O'Brien helped her with suggestions.



COMEDY TEAM Oliver Hardy (left) and Stan Laurel left the bus along with starlets Katherine Booth and Frances Gifford. The man at right is unidentified.



following of between 1,000 and 2,000 with their usual quips and insults. But in the afternoon and evening the caravan was all business. The troupe did a matinee performance before some 10,000 people who jammed St. Paul Auditorium. The gross receipts were \$28,329. In the evening the stars put on the show again before another packed house at Minneapolis Auditorium, grossing more than \$36,000 for a Twin Cities total of about \$65,000. What was left after tax and expense deductions was split between army and navy relief organizations. (For the whole national tour the gross was about \$600,000, according to the June 1, 1942, issue of *Life*.)

Each performance was a variety show of between three and four hours, with Bob Hope, Cary Grant, and Pat O'Brien acting as master of ceremonies. They introduced serious and funny skits, dances, songs, and readings that by all accounts added up to superlative entertainment. In the middle of the night on Sunday, May 10, the tired troupers climbed aboard their special train and

headed for Des Moines, Iowa, for another performance.

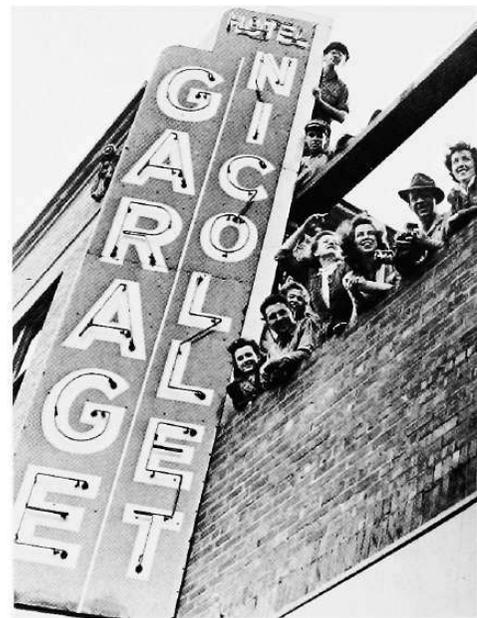
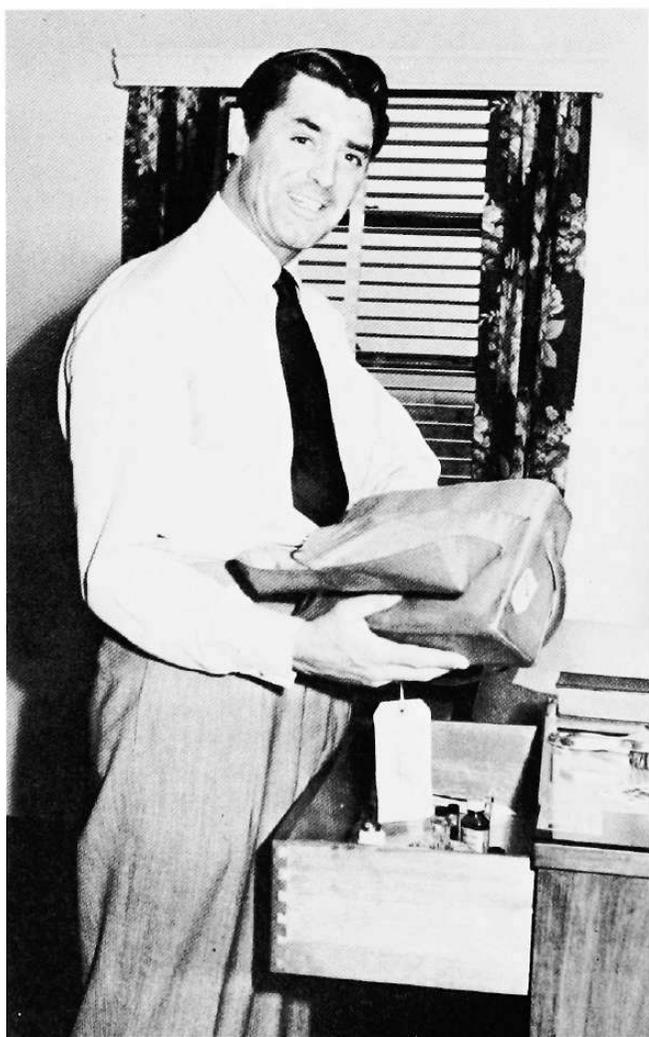
During their whole stay in the Twin Cities, the stars were very obliging with their time and willingly posed for pictures, as these photographs attest. They are from the MHS audio-visual library's collection of negatives donated through the years by the *Minneapolis Star Journal*, the *Minneapolis Star*, and the *Minneapolis Tribune*. This immense collection, although incomplete and indexed only by date, includes negatives made by the staff photographers of the newspapers since the late 1930s. Negatives of pictures not used in the newspapers are included in the collection as well as those of pictures published. Negatives of *St. Paul Dispatch* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press* photographs also have been donated to the society since the late 1940s.

The society is looking for funds for complete indexing of the many hundreds of thousands of newspaper negatives and to make the valuable collection available to the public.



CROWDS LINED Washington Avenue to get a look at the film stars as they moved from Milwaukee Station to the Nicollet Hotel. Note the woman watching from her vantage point behind a “dusted” window on the second floor at left. Just below her are posters advertising the Army-Navy Relief Show the stars put on.

CARY GRANT was one of the first to start unpacking after he got to his hotel room. The affable, handsome actor was one of the most popular in the caravan.



THESE SPECTATORS enjoyed a bird's-eye view from their perch next to the Nicollet Garage sign.

A SORE THUMB? Not really. Pipe-smoking Bing Crosby did a bit of clowning with Claudette Colbert for the photographer inside the hotel.



CHARLES BOYER obliged with a smile for the cameraman as he made his way through the crowd at Milwaukee depot. He had become an American citizen the previous February.

WHILE DINING, Olivia De Havilland, wearing polka dots, was interviewed by Mary Brown (back to camera), Minneapolis Tribune reporter.



JOAN BENNETT smiled prettily while entering her hotel room.



RISE STEVENS (right), opera star, was introduced at the Minneapolis show by "GI" Pat O'Brien. Behind Miss Stevens is Jerry Colonna.

FAR RIGHT: Jimmy Cagney smiled for his fans. The man behind him is Kenneth Thompson, co-chairman of the caravan. — Photo from Minneapolis Tribune.

BELOW: The show is on. Bob Hope and Cary Grant, joking in front of the curtain, took turns acting as master of ceremonies.





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