

Bob Hope at the National Press Club, July 8, 1980



Bob Hope (right) with White House photographer Andrew J. "Buck" May (left), July 1980. National Press Club Archives

Comedian Bob Hope (1903-2003) treated journalists at a National Press Club luncheon on July 8, 1980, to jokes he planned to deliver later in the week during performances at Washington's Kennedy Center Concert Hall. As part of a summer tour that coincided with the 1980 presidential election campaign, Hope's appearances at the Press Club and Kennedy Center gave audiences the opportunity to hear the legendary funnyman gently, but pointedly, skewer those in power, a talent he had perfected since Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. When Hope appeared in March 1944 at the White House Correspondents Association dinner at the Statler Hotel—the annual political roast hosted by the Washington press corps—and left Roosevelt roaring with laughter, the syndicated columnist Richard Wilson announced that a new era had begun. "The gap left by the death of [political humorist] Will Rogers has been filled," Wilson wrote. "Bob Hope has stepped into his shoes. From now on he will be sought in Washington to provide that extra touch at the capital's lavish public functions."

Hope's Press Club appearance came during the final phases of a career that spanned most of the twentieth century. The entertainment historian and critic Leonard Maltin has noted that Hope "may be the most popular entertainer in the history of Western civilization." A versatile performer—in addition to comedy, he excelled as a singer and dancer—Hope began in vaudeville in the 1920s, gained prominence on the Broadway musical stage during the 1930s, and became one of the nation's top radio

and movie stars in the 1940s. Hope hosted the Academy Awards ceremonies more times than anyone else and maintained high ratings in nearly a half century of television specials, including his Christmas shows entertaining American troops stationed abroad during wartime. Although he was 77 when he appeared at the Press Club, Hope would remain an active performer for a decade and a half longer.

A Knack to Entertain

As with many of the great American show business figures of his generation, Hope was an immigrant. Born Leslie Townes Hope, the fifth child of a peripatetic master stonemason struggling to find work in Britain at the conclusion of the Boer War, he arrived in this country at age four with his mother and brothers after his father had established himself in Cleveland where Hope's two uncles resided. Hope's desire to be an entertainer might be traced to his parents. "My dad was sort of an amateur comedian," he told an interviewer in 1980, "and he would go 'round and play a few pubs in England and have a few drinks with the boys. My mother was a concert singer in Wales before she got married."

Hope discovered early on that he had the knack to entertain. In the summer of 1915, after movie fans across the country had begun to dress up in imitation of their new screen idol, Charlie Chaplin, Hope, then 12, won a Chaplin look-alike contest at a Cleveland amusement park. A quarter of a century later, Chaplin would tell Hope, "You are one of the greatest timers of comedy I have ever seen." Hope revealed to an interviewer, "It was one of the high spots of my life to have this guy, you know, that I had imitated as a kid, say that to me."

Besides the movies, Hope loved vaudeville from an early age. His mother took him to a Cleveland theater to see one of vaudeville's most accomplished monologists, Frank Fay, whose poised manner of casually tossing off asides to the audience Hope would later emulate. "He just stood there and talked to the audience as if they were old friends," Hope wrote admiringly. "He was a fantastic timer of comedy." After quitting high school, Hope, who had made friends with a number of dancers, decided to pursue a career as a performer. He learned popular dance styles from the legendary entertainer, King Rastus Brown—considered by jazz dance historians Marshall and Jean Stearns to be the greatest tap dancer of all time—and from vaudeville hooper Johnny Root, who later taught dance to Hollywood stars. Taking a night job with an automobile company, Hope joined the office singing group, the Chandler Motor Car Quartet—otherwise known as the "Crankcase Carusos"—and served as master of ceremonies at sales meetings. After becoming a dance instructor himself, Hope worked up an act with his sweetheart, Mildred Rosequist, that they performed at social clubs and at small theaters in Cleveland. When Hope wanted to take the act on the road, however, his partner's mother objected and they broke up.

In 1924, Hope and a new partner from the dance school, Lloyd Durbin, debuted a comic dance act in a Cleveland vaudeville theater, appearing on the same bill with famed film comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, then in the declining stages of his career.

Arbuckle enjoyed the humor in the act and encouraged Hope to hone his comedic skills. Arbuckle recommended the team to Fred Hurley, the proprietor of a tabloid, or “tab,” show called the “Jolly Follies,” a short musical comedy revue that played smalltime vaudeville circuits in the Midwest. “It was a great place to pick up a lot of experience in doing different things,” Hope recalled. Besides offering training in versatility, touring on the tab circuit provided Hope with the opportunity to develop poise while performing before diverse audiences. “It did more for me, as far as stage presence and confidence on the stage was concerned, than anything else,” Hope judged. “Getting up in front of people and doing my stuff was the most natural thing in the world after working for Hurley. You could go to dramatic schools all your life and never get any easy feeling in front of an audience.”

Life on the road proved deadly to Hope’s partner, however. After contracting tuberculosis while traveling, Durbin collapsed while on stage in Huntington, West Virginia, complaining of food poisoning from a coconut cream pie he ate, and died three days later. Hope’s employer hooked him up with a new partner, George Byrne, and after leaving the tab show, they developed a comic dance routine—at one point they coined the term “Dancemedians” to advertise the act—modeled on the team of Duffy and Sweeney, knockabout satirists considered “one of the funniest nut acts in vaudeville,” by vaudeville historian Douglas Gilbert. On Hope’s first appearance in Washington in March 1927, a coming attraction notice in the *Washington Post* called attention to the team’s “untamed feet” and noted, “In addition to their dancing ability they are funmakers of the first rank.”

Hope and Byrne made it to Broadway later in 1927 in the revue *Sidewalks of New York*. They appeared only briefly in small parts, however, and soon were dropped from the show, which included a surplus of able dancers. After failing to make an impression at their next New York appearance, they decided to take the advice of a booking agent to go west, change the act, and start over. At a subsequent booking in New Castle, Pennsylvania, Hope was asked by the manager to announce the next week’s attractions. In the days that followed, Hope and the audience both discovered he had real ability to work a crowd as he built up a routine kidding the upcoming acts. Encouraged to try to succeed as a single, Hope convinced his partner they should split up. Taking Arbuckle’s advice to heart, Hope now sought to improve his comedic talent.

He also adopted a new first name. Earlier he had changed “Leslie” to “Lester,” but to no avail. He now tried “Bob.” “I wanted a chummier, more friendly name,” he later explained. “I figured the audience might like me better, and it sounded like more of a regular fellow.”

In Chicago in June 1928, in debt and desperate to find work, Hope hung around a theatrical office building where he ran into an old tap dance buddy from Cleveland, Charlie Cooley, who introduced him to Charlie Hogan, an agent who tried him out as an emcee in a small theater. Hogan then found Hope a similar job the following week at a larger neighborhood theater, the Stratford, that offered its audiences vaudeville acts and band music between screenings of movies. What started as a three-day engagement

extended into October and, after a break on the road, from January through March of 1929. The wife of the Stratford's orchestra leader, Maurie Hillblom, later reminisced about Hope's early days at the theater. "When he first started, the people tried to boo him off the stage," Erna Hillblom recalled. "But it never bothered him, and he stuck with it." Relying on a routine he worked out with Hillblom based on one that the great vaudeville monologist, Frank Tinney, had employed with his own orchestra leader as a straight man, Hope was able to establish a relaxed atmosphere that helped loosen up the audience and make them more receptive to his sometimes lame material.

With new bills offered twice every week to an audience of mostly regulars, Hope tried to keep his jokes fresh, honed a speedy delivery, and experimented with comic timing. He especially enjoyed working the audience. "They liked a simple kind of humor," Hope later wrote, "but also I could get them to work on a gag. One of the things I learned at the Stratford was to have enough courage to wait. I'd stand there waiting for them to get it for a long time. Longer than any other comedian had the guts to wait. My idea was to let them know who was running things." He developed "a sort of pseudo-sophisticated delivery," as he described it later. "You try to disguise and hide the joke." The audience, he realized, "enjoys that very much because it keeps them on their toes." At the Stratford, Hope also developed a speedy joke-telling technique, what his biographer and former publicity director, William Faith, has called "a shotgun delivery, which became his genius touch and something that could even 'save' inferior jokes." When Hope transferred this style to radio a decade later, he acquired the moniker "Rapid Robert."

Comedian Morey Amsterdam, who played the Stratford as a teenager when Hope was master of ceremonies, remembered benefiting from Hope's assistance. "I wore a crazy outfit that got a big laugh when I walked out, but I had nothing to follow it," Amsterdam told a reporter in 1974. "Bob would teach me what to do and what not to do. That was the first real instruction I ever got in comedy."

Hope formed an act he called "Keep Smiling" with his girlfriend and later first wife, Louise Troxell, whom he had trained as an attractive, but muddleheaded "Dumb Dora" comic foil during the break in the midst of the Stratford run. When they played in Texas during the summer of 1929, the manager of the Interstate Vaudeville Circuit, Bob O'Donnell, urged Hope to slow his delivery for the local audience. "It's summertime. It's hot," O'Donnell reminded him. "Why make it a contest to keep up with your material?" Hope would come to consider O'Donnell's advice "a turning point for me. He changed my tempo and made me wait for laughs from *all* my material." As William Faith has written, "Hope had learned an important lesson—the need to be sensitive to geographical and cultural differences in audiences."

O'Donnell encouraged the B. F. Keith office in New York, vaudeville's top booking agents, to sign him. Hope showed his act for a Keith agent at a theater considered New York's toughest and won the audience over. After hiring comedy writer Al Boasberg, "a great joke mechanic," in Hope's words, who specialized in "Dumb Dora" routines—he had crafted material for Burns and Allen and Jack Benny, and would later write for

Sophie Tucker, Eddie Cantor, and the Marx Brothers—Hope toured the country with Troxell on the Orpheum circuit.

In the fall of 1930, Hope and Boasberg devised a new show, the *Antics of 1930*, that added to the act a couple of “stooges”—Hope’s younger brother George and a vaudeville friend—planted in audience boxes to interrupt and heckle Hope. The act, considered by a *New York Times* reviewer to be a “fairly novel variation” of stooge acts that vaudevillians Fred Allen and Phil Baker recently had employed, led to a booking at New York’s Palace Theatre, vaudeville’s most prestigious house, in February 1931, during a time when many headliners were leaving vaudeville for other entertainment venues. To publicize the act, Hope had the troupe do a mock protest in front of the theater wearing signboards complaining that Hope was unfair to his stooges.

Years later, Hope told a business journal that the worst business decision of his life occurred during this period. Radio’s *RKO Theater of the Air*, he related, wanted to hire him in 1930, but he did not foresee the medium’s potential and so declined the offer. As the vaudeville industry struggled to survive during the Depression, comics like Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Ed Wynn, and Eddie Cantor, transferred their vaudeville skills to radio and created a host of popular variety shows. A late starter on the airwaves, Hope turned instead to the Broadway musical comedy stage as vaudeville declined.

Broadway Interlude

Hope’s first move out of vaudeville came when he joined the Broadway revue *Ballyhoo of 1932*, a show that was in many respects vaudeville without the name. Hope later joked that the show had more blackouts in it than London went through during the blitz. A year later, when Hope was back playing the Palace, theatrical producer Max Gordon brought composer Jerome Kern to see Hope’s act, as they needed to cast the role of the lead’s best friend for their new show, *Gowns by Roberta*, later shortened to just *Roberta*. Kern, though skeptical at first that Gordon was trying to “palm off one of your old vaudevillians on me,” agreed that Hope’s fast-paced delivery and clear command of his audience might enliven the show’s melodramatic libretto.

Kern and the show’s lyricist and librettist, Otto Harbach, encouraged Hope to interject his own one-liners to punch up the otherwise flaccid script. After the show opened, one reviewer related, “Bob Hope has most of the clever lines in the show.” With a hit on Broadway, Hope acquired a reputation for sophisticated comedy and also for singing and dancing that would lead to larger roles on Broadway. “I was an entirely different fellow on Broadway,” Hope remembered. “I was very chic and very subtle. I wouldn’t do a double-take for anything.”

During the run of *Roberta*, Hope, whose first marriage had ended, courted nightclub singer Dolores Reade. They performed together in a tour of high-class vaudeville theaters in eastern cities during the summer of 1934 after Hope’s contract with *Roberta* expired and married in the fall.

Hope landed a role in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*, a revival of the legendary star-studded Ziegfeld spectacles of bygone years. With the Shubert brothers producing along with Florenz Ziegfeld's widow, Billie Burke, the show boasted direction by Vincente Minnelli, choreography by George Balanchine, music by Vernon Duke, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, sketch material by Ogden Nash, David Freedman, and Billy Rose, and a stellar cast that included Fanny Brice, Gertrude Niesen, Josephine Baker, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, and the Nicholas Brothers. Hope sang the show's hit tune, "I Can't Get Started," to Eve Arden in a sketch created by Ira Gershwin.

Hope's final Broadway musical before he moved on to Hollywood, *Red, Hot and Blue!*—a political farce that wove pointed topical satire around a patently absurd plot—featured two of the hottest stars on Broadway, Jimmy Durante and Ethel Merman, with songs by Cole Porter, including the classic, "It's De-Lovely," introduced by Hope and Merman. At the 1978 Tony awards, Hope recalled his first encounter with Merman. "Ever try making yourself heard singing with Ethel?" Bob asked. "The first night, both my tonsils got hernias."

Paramount and Pepsodent

One month after *Red, Hot and Blue!* closed, Hope signed a contract with Paramount Pictures. The previous year, Paramount director Mitchell Leisen had seen Hope in the *Ziegfeld Follies* and mentally typecast him as a leading man with a comic presence similar to that of Jack Benny. When Benny was unavailable for a role in Leisen's new picture, *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, the director contacted Hope. A disastrous screen test that Hope had made in 1930 while he toured on the Orpheum circuit with Louise Troxell, had soured Hope on films. Since then, however, he had appeared in a number of short comedies filmed in New York that helped acclimate him to acting for the camera. In *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, Hope and Shirley Ross introduced the Academy Award-winning Leo Robin-Ralph Rainger number that became his theme song for life, "Thanks for the Memory."

Also in 1938, Hope began the weekly radio show for NBC that soon would make him one of the nation's top celebrities. The radio show allowed Hope to incorporate a variety of kinds of entertainment that he had mastered over the years. He opened the show with a rapid-fire monologue touching on topical matters. The monologue often was interrupted by one of his new stooges, "Professor" Jerry Colonna, who sported a six-inch mustache and spouted hilarious nonsensical banter. Hope also traded barbs with Vera Vague, "that nitwit of the network, that versatile vacuum," as Hope would introduce her, a homely variation on the Dumb Dora character that Troxell had played. Hope would sing duets with his guests, and the whole cast participated in satiric skits to close the shows.

Hope hired eight comedy writers and paid them well to supply him with an abundant flow of topical material to give the show a sense of immediacy that was lacking from other radio comedy. "The radio season ran thirty-nine weeks," he noted. "That meant I had to tell thirty-nine times as many jokes as I had used in a whole year of vaudeville."

Hope would audition his monologue before a live audience prior to airdate to see which jokes worked well. “A forced line or situation generally falls flat,” he told a reporter in 1939. “A joke or comic situation is like a hat, it must fit the personality of the individual. That’s why I always check and rewrite my scripts.” For many of his fans, Hope’s monologue soon became the “must hear” event of the radio week. More than 23 million people enjoyed his Pepsodent program broadcast every Tuesday night on NBC.

Hope discovered that he had become one of the nation’s most sought-after celebrities when the radio cast was asked to do a personal appearance tour in 1940. “We opened in the Chicago Theater and we were mobbed,” he told an interviewer. “People were lined up around the block, standing in the rain, waiting to get in.” They broke the house record in Chicago and at the Palace Theater in Cleveland, where he received \$23,000 for a week’s work. Due to the response, Hope was able to up his price for film roles. In a 1941 poll, 600 radio columnists and editors in the U.S. and Canada voted Hope their favorite entertainer. Throughout the decade, Hope’s concurrent radio and film careers worked in tandem to keep him in the pantheon of stars.

In movies, Hope revived his two-man vaudeville act routine when he teamed up with Bing Crosby to act in a series of “Road” comedies that began in 1940 and continued intermittently for more than twenty years. The two performers had been on the same vaudeville bill together at the Capitol Theatre in New York in December 1932. “It was the beginning of a long, pleasant and profitable association,” Hope reminisced. When Hope came west, they revived a routine they had done in New York at the Turf Club in Del Mar, where Crosby was part owner. Paramount production head William LeBaron saw the act and cast them for a script—then called *The Road to Mandalay*, but later changed to *Road to Singapore*—that other actors had turned down.

The Road pictures offered Hope the opportunity to draw on his vaudeville roots. In a typical plot, Hope and Crosby traveled to some far corner of the world as struggling song-and-dance men escaping from an unpaid bill or the infuriated father of a small town belle. Their subsequent contact with the exotic beauty of Dorothy Lamour intensified their ever-present rivalry. The films conveyed the feeling that Hope and Crosby ad-libbed a good amount of their lines. Hope, in fact, would have his radio writers add lines tailored to fit their public personae. He would then edit the material and work out the routines in detail with Crosby. “Bing and I had a chemistry,” Hope recounted. “There was a thing going on, a mesh thing where we could talk and stop and look at each other and do little different things that worked so good.” The films included memorable buddy songs, most of which were written by the songwriting team of Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke. In 1941, the National Board of Review rated *Road to Zanzibar* as one of the ten best films of the year. *Road to Rio* was the number one box office hit of 1947.

Entertaining the Troops

Hope’s best audiences in the 1940s by far were the men and women stationed far from home at military bases in the U.S. and abroad. Beginning in May 1941 and

continuing for nearly fifty years, Hope brought a variety show to military camps and war zones to entertain troops with song, dance, comedy, attractive women, and people in the news. "I find these audiences of soldiers and sailors like a tonic," Hope told a reporter in June 1942. "They are the most appreciative audiences in the world because so many of them have had little chance, before they went into the service, of seeing stage shows. They get so excited at times that they can't resist trying to join in the performance themselves, which is okay with me because then you know you are getting audience response, that they are not going to sit on their hands like so many audiences you sometimes encounter." In 1948, Hope began a tradition of bringing a Christmas tour to soldiers abroad when he entertained during the Berlin airlift. In 1954, he arranged to have the shows videotaped so that selected scenes could be edited together into television specials.

Hope won a 1943 George Foster Peabody radio award for his "untiring zeal and the high level of entertainment of his camp tours in the United States and throughout the world." The award stated, "The joy and strengthened morale which he has given to the men and women of the armed forces can never be measured." Hope's tours to entertain service personnel also included visits to wounded soldiers in base hospitals. "They love it when you yell in the hospital ward," he related. "I always walk in and say, 'Don't get up,' especially in the orthopedic ward where they're all wired and strung up." Hope often indicated that he got more out of the experience than he gave. In a 1944 *Variety* article he wrote to encourage other entertainers to join the war effort, Hope stated, "When you can meet the guys who are saving our world today, and can take their minds off of that terrific ordeal that they have to go through, that's really something." He maintained that "any actor or actress that misses this experience is missing a large part of his professional career—something that he'll never have a chance to experience again."

During Hope's first Vietnam War tour in 1964, terrorists in Saigon blew up a hotel across the street from the one reserved for Hope's troupe on Christmas Eve ten minutes before the troupe arrived. Two Americans were killed and 63 people were injured. According to a captured document released to the press in 1967, the attack sought to kill guests who came to see the show, but was mistimed. "It's hard to believe they were that critical of my act," Hope joked when he learned of the plot. "This isn't the first time people have tried to do away with me. The same thing happened with my vaudeville act—they were always trying to get me." Hope later related that his cue card handler, Barney McNulty, had held up the troupe for ten minutes to load extra cue cards he had written for Hope's ad-libs, and that afterward they hit a traffic jam, a delay that may have saved their lives.

Criticism and Acclaim

Hope's popularity began to slip during the 1960s. Critics complained about the predictability of his television specials and panned many of his later films. In a decade marked by increasing social and cultural conflicts, some found Hope's material out of touch with the younger generation and lacking in bite. A writer noted in 1970, "Some

critics feel Hope's disinclination to probe beneath the surface of life has produced a prefabricated humor which simply isn't very funny in a world so increasingly absurd."

Hope's hawkish position on the war in Vietnam also was much criticized. In November 1969, he served as honorary chairman for the Week of National Unity, an effort that aimed to encourage nationwide support of the Nixon administration's Vietnam policy and to counter demonstrations planned for the same time by the antiwar Moratorium movement. In 1970, Hope agreed to be a national chairman for "Honor America Day," a Fourth of July gathering on the Mall in Washington that was organized by three Nixon supporters, evangelist Billy Graham, hotel magnate J. Willard Marriott, and *Reader's Digest* president and executive editor Hobart Lewis. Hope characterized the event as a "celebration, not a demonstration" and asserted that "we're trying to keep the war out of this," but thousands of antiwar protesters tried to disrupt the event.

During this period, Hope encountered boos from college crowds angered that he had denounced those protesting the war and supported Vice President Spiro Agnew's attacks on the press. *Newsweek* reported that during Hope's 1969 Christmas tour in Vietnam, soldiers booed him when he relayed to them Nixon's promise that he had "a solid plan for ending the war." War correspondent Richard Boyle stated that at one show, the audience drowned out Hope with boos and attempted to rush the stage. When an interviewer related this story to Hope in 1980, he denied it, saying "That's just lies. I've never been booed." In a 1990 autobiographical account, however, Hope acknowledged that soldiers did boo during his show. "I realized they weren't booing me or the jokes," he contended, "but they knew the show was going to be seen at home and it was the only way they had of trying to let the country and the President know how they felt." The men, he stated, had been in a firefight that day that had taken the lives of many of their fellow soldiers. "They were too worn out, too heartsick, and too disillusioned to believe that anyone had a real plan to end the war and get them out of that hot, miserable, rotten jungle."

By the late 1970s, many who had been critical of Hope during the previous two decades had begun to sing his praises again. In May 1979, the Film Society of Lincoln Center held a gala in Hope's honor that led some to offer reassessments of his career. Noting that James Agee's critique from the 1940s of Hope as a "good radio comedian with a pleasing presence, but not much else, on the screen," had become "conventional wisdom among scholars and critics of film for the past two decades," Jeffrey Couchman, writing in the *New York Times*, judged Hope to be "a man worthy of a respected place in film history." Woody Allen, then at the height of his own popularity and critical acclaim, prepared for the gala a compilation of scenes from 17 Hope films that he narrated called "My Favorite Comedian." Although he conceded that "late Hope is not especially interesting," Allen confessed, in a voiceover during a clip from *Road to Morocco*, "I saw this film in 1942, when I was only 7 years old, but I knew from that moment on what I wanted to do with my life." Allen also demonstrated the influence on him of Hope's comedic style with a clip from his film, *Love and Death*.

Paying tribute to Hope in a *Film Comment* article around the time of the gala, Dick Cavett, the event's master of ceremonies, related, "From about the ages of twelve through fifteen, when people weren't looking, I would stand in front of a mirror and do jokes from Hope's most recent show, shifting my weight as he did on a punch line, staring into the imaginary camera with eyes slightly widened, then shifting my weight to launch into the next line, holding my arms at my side with one foot slightly forward, looking into the wings, and drawing down my upper lip while pressing the right canine against the tooth directly below it." Cavett continued imitating Hope throughout his career, as he confessed that "when nervous backstage, a few moments of walking like Bob magically brings back my confidence, or more accurately, fills me with his."

During the same tour that brought Hope to the National Press Club in 1980, the *New York Times* dance critic Jennifer Dunning aptly described his poised stage presence at that stage of his career. "He strolls back and forth across the stage deep in thought, the microphone wire trailing behind," she observed. "At a backward lean several degrees short of verticality, his shoehorn chin tucked into his collar, Mr. Hope is a master of provocative calm. Those black, laser-point eyes secretly sweep the audience, drinking in the variety of reactions to a casual finger pop or two."

Hope made some 65 personal appearances during the first half of 1980 prior to the Press Club talk. In addition, he frequented television talk shows, charity golf tournaments, college homecomings, and award and charity dinners. "I talk about golf, and flying, and my health and other people's health," he told a journalist earlier in the tour. "And politics." Hope ended the summer tour at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles, his first live performance in the area since 1939. *Los Angeles Times* critic Dan Sullivan advised his readers to forget "Bob Hope the Institution." "Hope's a working comic still," he wrote admiringly.

On May 19, 1998, the family of Bob Hope announced that they planned to donate to the Library of Congress the comedian's personal papers, radio and television broadcasts, scripts, joke files, films, and other materials, along with a gift fund to process and preserve the collection and to endow the Bob Hope Gallery of American Entertainment that subsequently was created in the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building. The Gallery opened on May 9, 2000, with a celebration that Hope attended with his family. The Gallery's inaugural exhibition, "Bob Hope and American Variety," celebrated Hope's life and career in the context of the American vaudeville tradition that has influenced the subsequent entertainment forms of radio, television, and motion pictures. The exhibit included a searchable, interactive database containing more than 88,000 pages of jokes, arranged by categories, taken from Hope's legendary joke files. The Gallery's current exhibition, "Hope for America: Performers, Politics & Pop Culture," explores the interplay of politics and entertainment in American public life and its consequences for the nation's political culture, focusing on entertainers like Hope who chose to involve themselves in the political climate of their times.

Hope received countless awards during his long life. Among his most treasured were the Congressional Gold Medal presented to him by President John F. Kennedy on

September 11, 1963, for “outstanding service to the cause of democracy, as America’s most prized ‘Ambassador of Good Will’ throughout the world.” In 1997, Congress passed a resolution designating Bob Hope an “honorary veteran of the United States Armed Forces,” the only such individual in history to have earned this honor. Upon signing the resolution, President Bill Clinton said, “Bob Hope is a great American whose life has defined patriotism and service. In times of war and peace, good times and bad, he entertained our troops and brought to them a familiar and comforting sense of home while they defended our nation’s interests around the world.” At a ceremony in the Capitol’s Rotunda, Dolores Hope spoke for her weakened husband and told the assembled gathering, “Bob wants you all to hear what he has to say: I’ve been given many awards in my lifetime, but to be numbered among the men and women I admire most is the greatest honor I have ever received.”

-- Alan Gevinson, *Special Assistant to the Chief,*
National Audio-Visual Conservation Center, Library of Congress

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