

# From

By John Barbour, AP Writer

LOS ANGELES — Only 45 years ago the young cowboy from Oklahoma — broad-brimmed hat, boots and all — stepped stiffly from the railroad coach he'd ridden across the country, checked his guitar and his suitcase and began pounding New York's sidewalks looking for a job.

He wanted to sing.

It wasn't that he thought the cowboy hat and boots would help. It was just the way he dressed back home.

In fact, Gene Autry looked much like the cowboys he sang about, including the one who got spruced up to visit the city, shedding his bandana and wearing a tie.

Today, Gene Autry is 66. He dresses like the conservative businessman he is. He owns a string of radio and television stations, a hotel in Palm Springs and the California Angels baseball team. He hopes to win an American League Pennant in a year or two. He once owned the stately Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco and a number of other hotels. In short, Gene Autry is a multimillionaire. He doesn't sing for his super anymore, and even if he did, his fans wouldn't recognize the voice.

IT IS DEEPER NOW than that of the white-hatted cowboy whose movies were built around his songs. He's come a long way from Tioga, Tex., where he was born, and the Oklahoma ranch where he helped his father raise mules and horses and cows as a youth, and the railroad ticket offices in the Southwest where he learned Morse, wrote train orders and sang to his guitar to pass the long night hours.

He started singing on station KVOO in Tulsa, and played to civic clubs like the Rotary. The depression was upon the nation and he was only working part time on the railroad.

"Everybody was workin' part time. Looks as if this thing keeps going the way it is, they're going to be workin' part time again."

In his first recordings he scored a big hit with "That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine," still one of his favorites. Then the hit parade continued with songs like "Mexicali Rose."

They wrote Autry into a Ken Maynard movie, Maynard being one of the kings of the rootin', tootin' shootin' set. The movie was "Old Santa Fe." Autry did two songs and had a part in the barn dance sequence.

"The picture did so well that in a lot of places on the theater marquees they billed me above Ken Maynard, and I was just a supporting player," says Autry. They quickly put Autry into a Western serial, 12 cliff-hanging chapters, and he was on his way.

"THE LAST MOVIE I made was in 1962 or somewhere around there," Autry says. "I couldn't tell you the name of it, tell the truth. I made so many. Let's see. I made 56 for Republic, one for 20th Century and the serial, and I did 40 for Columbia in which I



# Riding the Range to



was a partner. And then I did 100 half-hour shows for television.

"That's a lot of ridin'. A lot of ridin' and shootin'. I was asked by some guy sittin' there how many fights have you held. And I said just figure the pictures, and there was one or two in every picture.

"I fought more rounds than Dempsey."

After 3½ years in the Air Force in World War II he bought his first radio station, KOOL, in Phoenix. His partner was Tom Chauncey who remains his partner today. Then he bought another station in Tucson. Today most of his stations, from Los Angeles to Seattle, are grouped under Golden West Broadcasters.

But it seemed he had all his eggs in one basket, a government-controlled basket. He decided to diversify. "That's how I happened to get into the hotel business."

But the hotel business was tough, too, so he sold the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, and the Continental Hotel in Los Angeles.

He'd been an ardent baseball fan since his youth. He knew Dizzy Dean and his brother Paul, and in his Chicago days he met a lot of ballplayers. His stations broadcast the Giants and Dodger games on the West Coast. But when the Dodgers decided to go to another station in Los Angeles, Autry looked for his own baseball franchise. Which is how he came to own the Angels, an expansion club.

It all keeps him pretty busy. He goes to almost every home game, and tries to make one road trip a year. But he never forgets where it all began, in simpler days, in a more simple America.

"I DON'T THINK the country or the world as a whole has been in such damn turmoil as it is right now . . . It's a different generation than I was brought up in. They're slouchy. They don't care how they dress or anything like that. When I was a young guy growing up, I always wanted a nice haircut and my shoes shined and a good-looking outfit . . . And now it just seems the opposite . . .

"You didn't read or hear about the dope you have today. Of course back then there was prohibition, so you might see young men, but not kids, drinking out of fruit jars or something like that. But you didn't hear of dope peddling.

"Sure there's a lot of good kids around, too, many fine ones. I think unfortunately you read about the bad ones and you don't read about the good ones."

Gene likes to take a visitor through the old scrapbooks of his days as a singing cowboy. His records have sold almost 40 million copies. His biggest hit was "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer," which accounted for 10 million of those. But his favorites were "South of the Border," written by two Englishmen, and "Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine," and his theme song, "Back In the Saddle," naturally.

His favorite film was "The Last Round-up." He has purchased all of his old films and they are running now on his Los Angeles television station. "I forget to tune them in half the time. I have to watch them to find out what they are all about. If you make that many pictures over 25 years, it's pretty hard to remember."



# Rolling in Clover



*Gene Autry, the white-hatted cowboy tenor of the 1930's, is now a 66-year-old businessman with "a lot of ridin' and shootin' " — and nearly 100 movies and another 100 TV shows — behind him.*