

Class of 1940 - Kathryn LaVerne Starks, a.k.a. Kay Starr.



Kay was born on a reservation in Dougherty, Oklahoma. A popular jazz vocalist, she scored a gold single on the American Billboard Charts with “Rock and Roll Waltz” (1956). Her father was of Native American descent, her mother was of an Irish background. During her early youth, her father moved to Dallas and later suffered financially due to the Great Depression. Kay would amuse herself by singing which led to her entry and winning in a Dallas radio contest. This led to her own weekly program and following her family’s relocation to Memphis, she was given a radio show in that city. By her mid teens, she was the female vocalist with Joe Venuti and later had stints with Bob Crosby and Glenn Miller. She recorded with Charlie Barnet’s orchestra; however, she became stricken with pneumonia during this period and was forced to stop singing until she regained her voice again. Following her recovery, she resumed her recording career, as she covered several songs including Perry Como’s “Hoop-Dee-Do” (1950). In 1952, she recorded “Wheel of Fortune,” which went on to earn gold record status. She received a further Top 10 hit with “My Heart Reminds Me” in 1957. Over the next four decades, she continued to record and tour as a performer. She died of complications from Alzheimer’s disease.