

February 29

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Friday, 29 February 2008

February is a month for romance and a month for celebrating black history. On the last day of February, I'd like to give a brief celebration of both through a special event that happened on this day, 68 years ago.

On February 29, 1940, Bob Hope hosted the Oscars for the first time (He would go on to host the Oscars at least 20 more times). It was the 13th annual awards ceremony and the romantic film *Gone with the Wind* absolutely swept the evening. And Hattie McDaniel won Best Supporting Actress, making her the first African American performer to receive an Academy Award. *Gone with the Wind* also took Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Art direction, Best Cinematography, Best Film Editing, Outstanding Production, and Best Screenplay.

What better way to celebrate romance and Black History than with a romantic movie that swept audiences off their feet and served as a vehicle for McDaniel to be the first black performer to earn an Academy Award.

Gone with the Wind released in 1939 and topped box office records. When adjusted for inflation, the film grossed \$1,329,453,600. Directed by Victor Fleming and adapted from the novel by Margaret Mitchell, the film stars Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh. McDaniel was cast as the house servant. The story tells the tale of a complicated love affair that takes place in the Southern half of the United States during the Civil War. It's come to set a standard for romantic movies and nearly 70 years later, it's still a relevant, moving film.

Hattie McDaniel, born June 10, 1895 in Wichita, Kansas, was a multi-talented woman. She was a singer-songwriter, a comedienne, a stage actress, a radio performer, and a television star. She is honored with two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (one for her service to radio and the other for her contribution to film) and a US postage stamp. She is also in the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame.

This year's Oscars celebration was hosted by John Stewart. Among the nominations were: *No Country for Old Men*, *Michael Clayton*, *There Will be Blood*, and *Atonement*. Results are available at www.Oscar.com