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DES MOINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORYGRAM

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It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

Andy Williams and his family had a presence in Des Moines starting in 1920 when Gilbert E. and Louise Williams, the grandparents of the four singing brothers, moved from Wall Lake, Iowa. Gilbert was first in real estate then became a barber opening the DeLuxe Beauty Shop in the Drake area. Louise died in 1928 and Gilbert in 1941. They are buried at Glendale Cemetery. They had two children Jay and Cornelia.

Born in 1927, Howard Andrew Williams began performing with his three older brothers Dick, Bob, and Don, when he was 8, in the Presbyterian Church choir in their hometown of Wall Lake. Their father, Jay E., was the choirmaster. In 1932 daughter Jane joined the family and their sixth child, Gilbert E., was born in 1934, but unfortunately died at age 2 while the family was in Des Moines and is buried at the Glendale Cemetery. Jay was a mail clerk for the railroad which he was able to continue as the family moved around with the boys' performing opportunities.



By 1935 the family was living in Des Moines on Kingman Blvd, so the boys attended Elmwood, Callanan and Roosevelt schools between them over the five years the family was in Des Moines. They were on WHO Mondays 7:30 am -7:45 am. On Saturday evenings they were on the Barn Dance. In June 1940, the family with boys now ages Andy 12, Dick 13, Don 17, and Bob 21, moved to Chicago for appearances on the National Barn Dance radio program on WLS. In 1944, from Chicago, the Williams Brothers Quartet was on WHO Thursday Evenings 7 pm - 7:30 pm on the variety show Maxwell Iced Coffee Time with several entertainers. The family next went to Cincinnati when a radio station engaged the brothers.

A move to Los Angeles came next. There the brothers appeared in four films - Janie (1944), Kansas City Kitty (1944), Something in the Wind (1947) and Ladies' Man (1947). Also, in 1947, Bing Crosby invited the brothers to one of his shows where they did a song and dance act.



Andy's solo career began in 1951 when his brothers wanted to spend more time with their families. He recorded 44 albums including eight Christmas albums. The Andy Williams Show ran from 1962 through 1971. This series was so well-known for its annual Christmas show that Andy returned to TV for several additional Christmas specials in the 1970s, couple more in the '80s and '90s, and two retrospectives in 2001.