

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green color with several faint, stylized leaf motifs scattered across it. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves pointing upwards and to the right.

ANN SOTHERN

A Bio-Bibliography

Margie Schultz

The logo features a stylized green leafy branch to the left of the text.

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ANN SOTHERN



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A Bio-Bibliography

Margie Schultz

Bio-Bibliographies in the Performing Arts, Number 9
James Robert Parish, Series Adviser



Greenwood Press

New York • Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schultz, Margie.

Ann Sothern : a bio-bibliography / Margie Schultz.

p. cm. — (Bio-bibliographies in the performing arts. ISSN 0892-5550 ; no. 9)

Filmography: p.

Discography: p.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-313-26463-5 (lib. bdg. : alk. paper)

1. Sothern, Ann, 1909- . 2. Sothern, Ann, 1909- — Bibliography. 3. Entertainers—United States—Biography.

4. Motion picture actors and actresses—United States—Biography.

I. Title. II. Series.

PN2287.S64S38 1990

791.43 '028 '092—dc20 89-25626

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-25626

ISBN: 0-313-26463-5

ISSN: 0892-5550

First published in 1990

Greenwood Press, Inc.

88 Post Road West, Westport, Connecticut 06881

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Preface

Ann Sothern often was quoted as saying she had played every venue in show business except fairs. This book is proof that her statement was not far from wrong. For over 60 years, she has demonstrated her talent on the stage, in film, radio and television, and as a recording artist. She has managed to combine her successful acting career with other business ventures, which include cattle breeding, a sewing center, music publishing, and two production companies. She is a fine composer and artist. Additionally, she produced a beautiful and talented daughter, Tisha Sterling, who has followed her into the acting profession. Despite serious illness and a debilitating back accident, Miss Sothern has continued to act, receiving her first Academy Award nomination in 1988 for her seventieth film.

Ann Sothern began her career as Harriette Lake, playing small roles in motion pictures. After success in Broadway musicals, she returned to Hollywood where her name was changed to Ann Sothern. Few actresses have played such diverse roles, from ingenues to character parts, in comedies, musicals, and dramas. Despite her versatility, many people identify Miss Sothern with her three most popular roles: Maisie Ravier, the down-on-her-luck show girl whom she played in ten films and on two radio series; Susie MacNamara, the efficient-but-meddlesome secretary to a talent agent on TV's Private Secretary; and Katy O'Connor, the ever-helpful assistant manager of a luxury hotel on TV's The Ann Sothern Show.

This book is intended as an overview of Miss Sothern's life and career. It does not purport to be an in-depth biography. This volume is divided into eight sections, as follows:

- (1) a brief biography;
- (2) a filmography of the movies in which Miss Sothern appeared. Each film listing is preceded by the letter "F." Entries are arranged chronologically by year of

American release. Studio, year of release, production and cast credits, a short synopsis, and selected reviews are included for each film;

(3) a listing of Miss Sothern's plays and personal appearances. This chapter includes plays performed on Broadway, on tour, and in summer stock, as well as vaudeville and nightclub appearances. Each listing is preceded by the letter "P." Cities played, dates of performances, production and cast credits, a short synopsis, and selected reviews are included when available;

(4) a listing of Miss Sothern's national radio appearances. This chapter is divided into two sections dealing with Miss Sothern's series and guest appearances. The two series are preceded by the letters "RS;" listings of guest appearances are preceded by the letter "R." Each entry includes episode title, airdate, cast, and selected reviews;

(5) a listing of Miss Sothern's national television appearances. This chapter is divided into two sections dealing with Miss Sothern's series and guest appearances. The series listings are preceded by the letters "TS." A further division is explained at the beginning of the television chapter. The guest appearance listings are preceded by the letter "T." Each entry includes episode title, airdate, cast, brief synopsis, and selected reviews. Telefilms listed in this chapter receive the same treatment as theatrical releases;

(6) a discography of records made by Miss Sothern. Each listing is preceded by the letter "D." This chapter encompasses recordings of all speeds. Each entry includes record label, number, songs performed by Miss Sothern, and selected reviews;

(7) a listing of awards and honors bestowed upon Miss Sothern. Each entry is preceded by the letter "A." Listings include the name of award and approximate year of receipt;

(8) an annotated bibliography of writings by and about Miss Sothern. This chapter includes reviews, articles, and announcements from books, newspapers, magazines, tabloids, and trade papers, showing the diverse publications which have written about Miss Sothern's life and career. Each entry is preceded by the letter "B."

In addition, the book contains an appendix listing products advertised by Miss Sothern. A complete index of names and titles concludes the volume; index references are to the entry numbers within the various section listings. The career and biographical information contained herein are correct as of July 15, 1989. Any additions or corrections for future editions may be sent to the author in care of Greenwood Press.

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been written without the help and support of the many people who shared their research facilities and collections. I am especially grateful to my adviser, James Robert Parish, and my editor, Marilyn Brownstein, for their help and guidance.

I appreciate the contributions of the colleagues of Ann Sothern who took time to reminisce about their work with her: Rod Amateau, Pat Carroll, Jeff Corey, Madelyn Davis, Marsha Hunt, Mike Kaplan, Leonard Maltin, Don Porter, Carl Reiner, Danny Simon, Jesse White, Monya Lee for Don Fedderson, and Anita Mykowsky for Red Skelton. Special thanks to Diana McInerney for sharing the experiences of her late sister, Susan McInerney.

Several people went beyond the call of duty by sharing their expertise in certain areas: Connie Billips and Art Pierce, radio; Jim Gross of the Big Band Society of the Metroplex, Ray Ridge, and Leo Walker, music; Jim Davidson of Classic TV and Vincent Terrace, television; Sharon Lindy, theatre; and Carol Forsyth, photography.

I appreciate the many librarians who took time to research reviews and articles on Ann Sothern's tours. They were Michael Cogswell, University of North Texas Music Library; Jeff Driggers, Jacksonville Public Library; Eleanor Gehres, Denver Public Library; Alex Gildzen, Kent State University Library; Steve Glatter, Miami Dade Public Library; Ruby Graise, St. Louis Public Library; Virginia Hasenstein, Minneapolis Public Library and Information Center; Nancy Perrin, Corning Area Public Library; Carla Rickerson, the University of Washington Library; Henry F. Scannell, Boston Public Library; Mary Schramm, Arlington Heights Municipal Library; and the staffs of the Cincinnati Public Library, the Hawaii State Library, the Milwaukee Public Library, the San Francisco Public Library, and the Santa Barbara Public Library. Of special mention are Thomas H. Gunn, Director of the Carl S. Swisher Library, Jacksonville University and Ginger Piotter of the Ketchum

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Community Library. Mr. Gunn eagerly shared information on the films Miss Sothern donated to the university and also investigated the seminars she taught in the 1970s. Ms. Piotter generously shared photographs from the library's Ann Sothern collection and helped discern the facts from recent articles on Miss Sothern.

I am also grateful to the following people and institutions for their contributions: ABC; James Taylor Breen; Beverly Bare Buehrer; Ann Nelson and Ileana Harustak, CBS; Kirk Crivello; Lee Goldberg; Stanley Green; Ken Mandelbaum; Geri McNamara; Jim Meyer; Wayne Miller; Jerome Morissey; Lowell Accola and Lorene Springer, the Museum of Broadcasting; Nickelodeon; Paul A. Weber, General Manager of Paulist Productions; Bob Reed; Barbara Doran-Veevers, Administrative Director of the Santa Barbara International Film Festival; Kevin Sweeney; Gary Thomas; Sandy Weber; John Willis; and Reg Shrader, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

I could not have compiled such a diverse bibliography without the help of some of Ann Sothern's admirers. Thanks to the following people for opening up their collections: Kim Altana; Colin Briggs; Carol Hall; Allan Herzer; Brian Matteo; and Lisa Wade.

Four people deserve special mention, for without them this book could not have been written. I am grateful to Betsy Schoellkopf for convincing me to watch Nickelodeon. Without her urging me to tune in My Three Sons, I would not have discovered The Ann Sothern Show. Additional thanks goes to Barry Rivadue, who not only helped with research, but offered encouragement and ideas for making this the best book possible. A final thanks to my parents, William and Margie, for their support and love.

ANN SOTHERN

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Biography

Harriette Arlene Lake was born on January 22, 1910 in Valley City, North Dakota. Her mother, Annette Yde-Lake, was a concert singer who stopped touring long enough to have her first daughter in what was reported to be 40-below zero temperatures. Harriette claimed to have never seen her birthplace. Harriette's father was Walter J. Lake, variously reported as an itinerant thespian, a produce broker, a meat salesman, and an importer/exporter. Harriette's maternal grandfather was Danish violinist Hans Nilson. Her paternal grandfather was Simon Lake, inventor of the submarine.

Harriette was the oldest of three daughters. Marion, born 18 months after Harriette, at one time worked as her sister's personal secretary. In later years Marion worked for Abigail Van Buren, better known as "Dear Abby." Bonnie, the youngest Lake daughter, was a singer and songwriter. She sang with her husband Jack Jenney's band, as well as that of Artie Shaw. Her compositions included "Man with a Horn," "St. Francis of Assisi," and "Wild Card.". She also wrote special material for her sister. Additionally, the Lakes had a half-sister, Sally.

Harriette spent her childhood narrowly escaping serious injury in a series of accidents. She often recalled that she was run over by nearly every type of wheeled vehicle except a horse and buggy - and missed it only because they were obsolete. When she was about six years old, her nightgown caught on fire while she was playing with matches at her grandmother's house. According to Movie Mirror, Harriette's mother rolled her in a rug to extinguish the flames. It took months of skin grafts to repair the scars on young Harriette's arms, legs, and back (see B-473).

Harriette was educated in public schools in Waterloo, Iowa, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her mother gave her a firm musical background, often letting young Harriette accompany her on concert tours. Harriette and Marion sometimes performed a sister act on tour until they reached

school age. According to the Minneapolis Journal, Harriette studied piano with Sophie Skjerdtingstad-Dahl and Countess Moroztyn at the McPhail School of Music where her mother taught (B-200). Harriette showed early musical talent, mastering Beethoven and Brahms by age 11. At 13, her "Study in B" was performed by the Minneapolis Symphony (B-12). Backyard musicals earned Harriette her first fan letter from music critic E. Johann Egilsrud, houseguest of a neighbor. According to the Milwaukee Journal, Egilsrud not only praised her performance, but predicted a bright future for Harriette in the world of music and theatre (B-193). By the time she graduated from Minneapolis's Central High School in 1926, Harriette had won a city-wide musical composition contest sponsored by the Minneapolis Journal for three consecutive years. According to the New York Herald Tribune, she represented her district at the National Music Supervisor's Conference in Detroit (B-320).

The Lakes divorced in 1927. Annette moved to California where she worked as a vocal coach at Warner Bros. Walter moved his import/export business to Seattle. Harriette lived with her father while attending the University of Washington for one term during the 1928/29 academic year. In 1979 she told the Seattle Times that she was too young to enroll and therefore took only a few classes (B-182). A 1959 Coronet interview quoted her as saying, "I got good marks in everything but math" (B-226). Despite the fact that a 1935 issue of Movie Classic said she attended the University of Washington for three years, and other publications claim that she graduated, the University of Washington's records show Harriette enrolled for only one year (B-269).

While visiting her mother in California in 1929, Harriette landed a role in the motion picture Show of Shows. She appeared in a musical sequence called "Meet My Sister" in which many real-life sisters sang and danced in costumes representing different countries. They included Loretta Young and Sally Blane, and Sally O'Neill and Molly O'Day. Harriette played Marion Byron's sister and wore an Italian costume.

According to Movie Classic, it was studio worker Bill Koenig, a friend from Minneapolis, who was responsible for Harriette's first screen test (B-269). In addition to Show of Shows, she appeared in Hearts in Exile and Hold Everything at Warner Bros. Later MGM tested her and producer Paul Bern took her under his wing. She played a small role in Doughboys, falling off a motorcycle into a mud puddle. She also dubbed the bark for a dog in a Pete Smith short. Broadway Nights (1927) and Whoopee (1930) are sometimes listed in Harriette's early filmography, however most film historians do not include them in her credits.

Harriette soon became frustrated with walk-on roles. She spent more time posing for publicity stills and appearing at special events than she did acting.

According to the Minneapolis Journal, Florenz Ziegfeld was in Hollywood working on Whoopie, an Eddie Cantor film, when he met Harriette at a party. One of the guests urged her to perform for the great showman. Ziegfeld offered her a job in one of his Broadway productions, and Harriette readily accepted, forgetting about her MGM contract. The studio did not renew her option after six months and Harriette headed east to accept Ziegfeld's offer (B-347).

Harriette was cast in Smiles, a musical starring Marilyn Miller, and Fred and Adele Astaire. As Glory, third female lead, Harriette initially had three songs: "Blue Bowery," "More Than Ever," and "Dance Wedding." She opened in Smiles at the Colonial Theatre in Boston on October 28, 1930. According to It Ain't Necessarily So, an autobiography by cast member Larry Adler, Harriette's "Blue Bowery" was a hit in Boston, causing some friction with the show's star. Adler said, "Marilyn Miller told Ziegfeld that she wanted Miss Lake out and out she was" (B-6). The show opened in New York on November 18, 1930 without Harriette.

Within a few months Harriette made her Broadway debut in America's Sweetheart, a musical with songs by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. She introduced "I've Got Five Dollars" with leading man Jack Whiting. The show lasted 135 performances. According to Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers did not want Harriette in the show, but producer Laurence Schwab insisted that she get the role of Geraldine. Harriette recalled her work in the production. "Actually, I can't speak with any authority about Rodgers and Hart because I was so young and under my mother's thumb. Everything was her decision...The only thing I can remember about the whole play is that in the first act they pushed me into a fountain, and I always had a wet fanny every night" (B-278).

Harriette starred in a musical version of Up Pops the Devil called Everybody's Welcome in late 1931. Her co-stars were Oscar Shaw, Ann Pennington, and the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra. The show ran 139 performances.

According to music expert Ray Ridge, Harriette was engaged to musician/arranger Mickey Bloom during this time. Bloom played trumpet with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra and was later a sideman with the orchestras of Rudy Vallee, Hal Kemp, and Tommy Dorsey. Ridge, a long-time friend of Bloom, blamed the musician's infidelity for his breakup with Harriette.

Harriette and Oscar Shaw were reunited in 1932 for the national tour of Of Thee I Sing. The Pulitzer-Prize-winning musical opened in Detroit on September 12, 1932 and toured successfully for seven months. After the tour, Harriette went to Chicago to rest. Three weeks later, general manager Max Siegel asked Harriette to replace Lois Moran in the Broadway company of Of Thee I Sing. The Broadway engagement had been extended for an indefinite run, however a heat wave hit New York, forcing many theatres to close for the summer. Harriette's Broadway run in Of Thee

I Sing lasted one week.

After Of Thee I Sing, Harriette decided to give Hollywood another try. She appeared in a beach scene in Broadway Thru a Keyhole with another aspiring starlet, Lucille Ball. The two became friends and their career paths continued to cross for the next 30 years. Harriette also appeared in the "Shanghai Lil" production number in Footlight Parade in 1933.

According to Motion Picture, Columbia executive Harry Cohn was searching for a Scandanavian actress for the lead in Let's Fall in Love (B-164). He had seen Harriette on stage and decided she would fit the role. However, Cohn insisted that she change her name. In a 1987 interview on American Movie Classics cable, the actress told how she was transformed from Harriette Lake to Ann Sothern. "[Harry Cohn] said, 'Well, we can't have your name Lake because there are too many Lakes,'" Ann recalled, citing Arthur Lake and Alice Lake as examples. "He made out a list and he called me in," she continued. "On the list there were a lot of names there. Having been a good student of Shakespeare and that sort of thing, E. H. Sothern's name was there. I admired him because he was a very fine Shakespearean actor, so I took Sothern. My mother's name was Annette, so I took Ann. And that's how I became Ann Sothern" (T-56). In the same interview she stated that her real name had come from her father's best friend, Harry.

Ann scored so well in her first featured role that she was immediatly signed to a long-term contract by Columbia. During her first fourteen months in Hollywood, she made nine films, many of which were on loan-out, including Kid Millions, Folies Bergere, and Blind Date. Ironically, she was cast in Eight Bells; she had performed a scene from the play for her screen test.

Ann soon tired of her ingenue roles at Columbia. "I didn't appear in B or C pictures - I was in Z pictures," she recalled in a 1946 Movie Show interview (B-212). Unlike many young actresses who wanted glamorous roles and pretty wardrobes, Ann preferred parts with substance. In 1935 she told Motion Picture, "...character parts are what I want to play most of all. I'd trade a 'pretty girl' role any day in the week for that of an old hag, if the hag was a real character" (B-164). According to Filmograph, Ann asked Frank Capra to let her read for the role of the prostitute in Lost Horizon. "He just laughed and said I was too young and pretty," Ann recalled (B-80). She asked for her release and moved to RKO in 1936.

During this period, Ann went through a variety of stages, trying to find the right look for the screen. She told Movie Mirror, "It wasn't until I had gone through an almost grotesque series of experiments on arching and straightening my eye brows, enlarging my mouth line, changing my hair from yellow-blonde to reddish-blonde to almost dark again that I realized the happy medium 'honey blonde' was the correct color and line for me!" (B-225).

Although her appearance was changing, her roles were not. Ann had hoped RKO would give her more fulfilling parts. Instead, she found herself teamed with Gene Raymond in a series of low-budget romantic comedies. Columbia had first loaned Ann to RKO in 1935 for Hooray for Love with Raymond. With the pair under contract in 1936, RKO reteamed them in four pictures: Walking on Air, Smartest Girl in Town, There Goes My Girl, and She's Got Everything.

RKO also loaned out Ann's services for a series of less-than-stellar films. Ann was growing more dissatisfied. When RKO wanted to cast her in a small role in Joy of Living, Ann finally asked to be released from her contract. RKO conceded in 1937. Ann took a year off from films, waiting for a quality script. She spent the time reorganizing her personal life and following her husband, Roger Pryor, a bandleader and actor whom she had married in 1936.

Born in 1901, Roger was the son of Arthur Pryor, a renowned orchestra leader. Roger acted on stage and sporadically led an orchestra of his own. In 1928 he married Priscilla Mitchell. They had a daughter around 1931. In 1933 Roger left his family in New Jersey to pursue a movie career. Priscilla took up residence in Reno in 1934 in order to divorce him. However, she left before the six-week waiting period was over.

Ann first met Roger in Chicago in 1932 while she was starring in Of Thee I Sing and he was appearing in Blessed Event. They met again in Hollywood when they co-starred in the film The Girl Friend in 1935. According to Screen Guide, Ann and Roger rekindled their romance in Hollywood, although he was only separated from his wife (B-312). Priscilla Pryor finally went through with divorce proceedings in 1936 and married again the day after receiving her decree. By this time, Roger had gone on the road with his band. He returned to California as Ann was finishing Smartest Girl in Town and told her he had signed a year's contract for his band at the College Inn in Chicago. Despite the known separation, Ann and Roger decided to get married immediately. However, they forgot the mandatory three-day notice period. "Even when they remembered, they supposed that filing the intention to wed on Wednesday would allow them to marry on Saturday," Screen Guide reported. "And such would be the case - except the first day doesn't count" (B-312). With Roger due in Chicago for a band rehearsal, the only alternative to postponing the wedding was to marry after midnight. After four years of waiting, Ann and Roger were married at one minute after midnight on September 27, 1936 at the Hollywood Congregational Church. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend J. Hamilton Lash. Despite the fact that it was her first marriage, Ann wore a metallic blue gown designed by Irene because Roger had an aversion to brides in white.

The Pryors spent their honeymoon in Chicago where Roger's band was playing. Ann made a personal appearance at

the Palace Theatre during the week of October 16, reminding audiences that she began her career as a singer. After the working honeymoon, Ann returned to her studio obligations. The movie magazines had a field day reporting on her long distance marriage. In 1937 Ann told Photoplay, "...we married not to risk our love, but to save it. This way, we are continually working toward something, rather than away from it and everything we do is in anticipation of the few hours or days or weeks we can be together" (B-128).

After Ann was released from her RKO contract, she held out for a role with substance. She traveled with Roger, often appearing with his band. In November, 1937, Roger was appearing at the Baker Hotel in Dallas. Ann came to visit him for Thanksgiving. While in Dallas, she befriended David Hobbs, a ten-year-old newsboy. David came from a large, poor family. Ann convinced his parents to allow him to go to California to live with her, hoping she could eventually adopt him.

David resided with Ann and Roger for two years. During that time, Ann had his teeth straightened, gave him piano lessons, and provided a fine education. Despite the luxuries, David missed his family. When his parents visited Beverly Hills, David begged to join them on the central California ranch where his father was working. He left the Pryor home to live in a tent with his 11 siblings. According to the New York Herald Tribune, David said, "[Ann and Roger] were swell to me...but I just wanted to be home" (B-7).

Waiting for a quality role proved to be the boost Ann's career needed. However, when producer Walter Wanger offered her a character part in Trade Winds, she was cautious. She told Motion Picture in 1940, "...I was so bent on making the right start again that I hesitated two weeks before signing for the role" (B-268). Although the film starred Joan Bennett and Fredric March, Ann was praised by the critics as a new discovery. She was offered a role in East Side of Heaven opposite Bing Crosby, but had to turn it down because she was under contract to Roger Pryor for a series of personal appearances. Instead, the role went to Joan Blondell, an actress whom many thought resembled Ann.

Ann's next offer arrived at a more opportune time and it altered her career for the next 13 years. Producer J. Walter Ruben noticed Ann's superior work in Trade Winds and offered her the title role in MGM's Maisie. Maisie Ravier was a brassy Brooklyn showgirl who became involved in a series of adventures as she drifted from job to job. Based on the stories by Wilson Collison, the film had originally been intended as a vehicle for Jean Harlow. The script had been shelved after her death in 1937 because the studio could not find a suitable replacement. Ann's work in Trade Winds reminded Ruben of her sassiness in Folies Bergere. Ruben thought Ann would be the perfect Maisie.

Despite the fact that Maisie was intended as a 'B' picture, Ruben had difficulty convincing the MGM executives

that Ann was right for the role. When the film was released in 1939, it grossed more than three times its cost. MGM chief Louis B. Mayer insisted on signing Ann to a contract, guaranteeing a series of Maisie adventures. During the next thirteen years, Ann made nine more Maisie films and starred in two radio series based on the character.

Ann also made Hotel for Women in 1939 for 20th Century-Fox. Her role was originally that of co-star with Linda Darnell, but the studio pared down Ann's part after the successful release of Maisie. They did not want to build up the career of an actress who had signed with a rival studio.

Under her MGM contract, Ann made at least one Maisie feature a year. Although she often felt typecast, Ann used the Maisie film series as leverage to do pictures of her choice. She told Filmograph, "Every Maisie film cost under \$500,000 and made two to three times that back. Sure, I felt she was a millstone around my neck at times. I'd tell Mr. Mayer to give me a musical and I'd do another Maisie. We'd bargain in that way" (B-80).

In addition to her Maisie commitments, Ann played a variety of roles on screen and radio. She was cast as a series of dumb blondes in Joe and Ethel Turp Call on the President, Brother Orchid (on loan-out to Warner Bros.), and Dulcy. She returned to her musical roots in Lady Be Good and Panama Hattie. An emergency appendectomy on January 15, 1940 cost her the second lead in Waterloo Bridge, but she did a dramatic turn in Cry Havoc in 1943. Time announced Ann would also star in Du Barry Was a Lady, Come and Get It with Clark Gable, and an unnamed film with Spencer Tracy, however none of the projects materialized with Ann as the star ("The New Pictures." Time. August 18, 1941.) Fred Stanley said she was also mentioned for The Female of the Species, a film loosely based on the career of pioneer newswoman Nellie Bly ("Hollywood Turns to Inspirational Films." New York Times. December 19, 1943.).

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ann made several appearances on radio anthologies like Lux Radio Theatre, Silver Theatre, and Screen Guild Theatre, which was hosted by Roger Pryor. Despite the diversity of her roles, the public identified her only as Maisie. MGM was proud to publicize the fact that fans demanded Ann sign her autograph as Maisie and that fan letters came addressed simply "Maisie, U.S.A."

Despite Ann's success on screen, her private life was less than idyllic. On July 7, 1939, Roger filed for bankruptcy. A smoldering cigarette destroyed the guest room Ann was decorating for Roger's daughter. In 1941, \$7,000 worth of jewelry was stolen from Ann's home. That September, Ann and Roger announced a trial separation. Ann filed for divorce on April 14, 1942, on the grounds of "great and grievous cruelty." She received her interlocutory decree on May 8, after telling Judge Harry R.