

Lillian Randolph born on December 14, 1898 died September 12, 1980 was an American actress and singer, a veteran of radio, film, and television. She worked in entertainment from the 1930s well into the 1970s, appearing in hundreds of radio shows, motion pictures, short subjects, and television shows.

Born Castello Randolph in Knoxville, Tennessee, she was the younger sister of actress Amanda Randolph. The daughter of a Methodist minister and a teacher, she began her professional career singing on local radio in Cleveland, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan. At Detroit's WXYZ, She was noticed by George W. Trendle, station owner and developer of *The Lone Ranger* and *The Green Hornet*. He got her into radio training courses which paid off in roles for local radio shows. Lillian was tutored for three months on "racial dialect" before getting any radio roles. She moved on to Los Angeles in 1936 to work on Al Jolson's radio show, on *Big Town*, on the Al Pearce show, and to sing at the Club Alabam there. Though Lillian and her sister, Amanda, were continually looking for roles to make ends meet in 1938, she was gracious enough to open her home to Lena Horne, who was in California for her first movie role in *The Duke Is Tops*; the film was so tightly budgeted, there was no money for a hotel for Horne. Lillian opened her home again during World War II with weekly dinners and entertainment for servicepeople in the Los Angeles area through American Women's Voluntary Services (AWVS).

Lillian is best known as the maid Birdie Lee Coggins from *The Great Gildersleeve* radio comedy and subsequent films and as Madame Queen on the Amos 'n' Andy radio show and television show from 1937 to 1953. Lillian got the "Gildersleeve" job on the basis of her wonderful laugh. Upon hearing the Gildersleeve program was beginning, Randolph made a dash to NBC. She tore down the halls; when she opened the door for the program, she apparently fell on her face she was not hurt and laughed to cover her embarrassment, that got her the job.

She also portrayed Birdie in the television version of *The Great Gildersleeve*. In the spring of 1955, Lillian was asked to perform the Gospel song, "Were You There?" on the television version of the Gildersleeve show. The positive response from viewers resulted in a Gospel album by Lillian on Dootone Records. She also found the time for the role of Mrs. Watson on *The Baby Snooks Show* and Daisy on the *Billie Burke Show*. Her best known film roles were those of Annie in *It's a Wonderful Life* and Bessie in *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*.

Some other notable work in films, however, is her uncredited voiceover part as the maid character, Mammy Two Shoes, in William Hanna and Joseph Barbera's *Tom and Jerry* cartoon short subjects for Metro Goldwyn Mayer during the 1940s and early 1950s.

Randolph made a guest appearance on a 1972 episode of the sitcom *Sanford and Son* as Aunt Hazel, an inlaw of the Fred Sanford character who humorously gets a cake thrown in her face, after which Fred replies "Hazel, you never looked sweeter!"

She also had a role in the television miniseries, *Roots* and did more film work in *The Onion Field* and *Magic*. In March 1980, she was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame.

Randolph died of cancer in Los Angeles, California on September 12, 1980 at the age of 81. She was buried in Forest Lawn Memorial Park (Hollywood Hills). For unknown reasons her grave says she was born in 1914. Her sister, Amanda, is buried beside her.

