

## **Kyser, James Kern ("Kay")** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by [William S. Powell](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, 1988

**18 June 1906–23 July 1985**



Kay Kyser with Band. Courtesy of the NC Museum of History.

<sup>[3]</sup>James Kern ("Kay") Kyser, orchestra leader, actor, and Christian Science lecturer, was born in Rocky Mount, the son of Paul B. and Emily Royster Howell Kyser. As a student at [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[4]</sup> in 1926, he organized his first band and played for college dances. At Chapel Hill he was also a cheerleader and later wrote the fight song, "[Tar Heels on Hand.](#)" <sup>[5]</sup> Following his graduation in 1928 he took his band on tour, playing for theaters, hotels, nightclubs, and



Kay Kyser and cheerleader cheering for North Carolina team at Duke University-North Carolina football game. Durham, North Carolina. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

[National Broadcasting Company](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, he began a weekly program, "[College of Musical Knowledge.](#)" <sup>[8]</sup> which quickly became one of the most popular programs on the air. He introduced and featured many singers and instrumentalists who worked with his orchestra as well as with others.

With a good ear for music and a keen sense of humor, his career flourished and he acted in a number of motion pictures and recorded for Columbia Recording Corp. During [World War II](#) <sup>[9]</sup> he frequently entertained troops overseas. It was while thus engaged that Kyser became

impressed by the sacrifice many servicemen were making and resolved to end his career in which he played and entertained for money. He was unable to free himself from professional commitments, particularly television, until 1950, but from that time he devoted himself to other matters. In 1951 he moved to Chapel Hill and spent three years helping to plan and raise funds for public television and enlarging the health affairs program at The University of North Carolina.

As a youth Kyser had been impressed by his mother's recovery from pneumonia through [Christian Science](#) <sup>[10]</sup> when

physicians had given up hope for her. Although raised as a member of the Baptist <sup>[11]</sup> church, he was long interested in Christian Science and in 1967 became head of the film and broadcasting division of the Christian Science church, spending much time in the church's headquarters in Boston. He also was a lecturer for the church and traveled widely.

Kyser married Georgia Carroll, a soloist with his orchestra, and they became the parents of three daughters: Amanda, Carroll, and Kimberly. He was buried in the old Chapel Hill Cemetery.

#### References:

*Chapel Hill Newspaper*, 24, 28 July 1985.

*Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 July 1985.

*Who's Who in America* (1942, 1948, 1953).

#### Additional Resources:

Kay Kyser in IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0477517/> <sup>[12]</sup>

Kay Kyser and Georgia Carroll Kyser Papers, 1906-2004 (collection no. 05289). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kyser,Kay\\_and\\_Georgia\\_Carroll.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kyser,Kay_and_Georgia_Carroll.html) <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed June 25, 2013).

Twin County Museum and Hall of Fame: [http://twincountyhalloffame.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=136&profile=10](http://twincountyhalloffame.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=136&profile=10) <sup>[14]</sup>

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Kay Kyser with Band. Courtesy of the NC Museum of History. "Photograph, Accession #H.1964.121.12 <sup>[3]</sup>." 1964. North Carolina Museum of History (accessed June 25, 2013).

Kay Kyser and cheerleader cheering for North Carolina team at Duke University-North Carolina football game. Durham, North Carolina. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Available from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8a41601/> <sup>[6]</sup> (accessed June 25, 2013).

"That's Right You're Wrong The Answer is Love ", Kay Kyser. Available from Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e73xYaSMtyo> <sup>[15]</sup> (accessed June 25, 2013).

#### Subjects:

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Biographies <sup>[17]</sup>

#### Authors:

Powell, William S. <sup>[18]</sup>

#### Origin - location:

Edgecombe County <sup>[19]</sup>

Nash County <sup>[20]</sup>

Orange County <sup>[21]</sup>

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