



HARRY SWEET



Class of 1986

Silver Circle Profile
By: **Kevin Wing**



Every television newsroom in Sacramento owes a debt of gratitude to a man named **Harry Sweet**. And, it's safe to say that every newsperson in California's state capitol knows who Sweet is and what he's meant to Sacramento television.

Sweet is a true pioneer of the television news business, and he made his indelible mark on the Sacramento market for four decades as a master of his craft. It's highly likely that every major news event in Sacramento and Northern California that occurred during Sweet's many years in the business were pictures and images he shot.

At 89, Sweet is one of the most senior members of the NATAS San Francisco/Northern California *Silver Circle*. Inducted in the first class 1986, he also received the Governors' Citation in 1999, not to mention an extraordinary amount of awards and honors that are too numerous to even mention.

Sweet became a TV pioneer in Sacramento when he went to work as the first cameraman for KCCC-TV (now KTXL) in October of 1953. He was the Sacramento Valley's first TV news photographer. He remained at Channel 40 for four years, then went to work across town for KCRA, to which in 1957 he would begin a 35-year career at the NBC affiliate.

Sweet has done it all. Sweet has seen it all. Through the years, his friends and colleagues have called him an institution. Today, they're still calling him that.

In the years of news film, Sweet shot more than 10 million feet of it before the advent of videotape. There's an old photograph of Sweet in his office at KCRA, surrounded by spools and spools of news film. It was a meticulous way of editing images in those days. Most of us these days would cringe at the idea of manually editing film compared to how it's done today on laptops and desktop computers. But, Sweet did it all, and he relished every moment of it. He always did his work with a big smile.

Throughout his career, Sweet has met a long, long list of luminaries, from local politicians and movie stars to sports celebrities and, oh, a future president. He's done interviews with Governors **Edmund G. Brown, Jerry Brown, Ronald Reagan** and **George Deukmejian**.

In the 1970s, when Reagan ran for president, Sweet was hand-picked to fly with the former California governor as he flew around the nation for appearances and fundraising events.

Besides covering politics and local, daily news stories, Sweet was also the go-to cameraman to shoot documentaries. He did them all. Among Sweet's favorite film documentaries was the year-long documentation of the restoration of downtown Sacramento, in 1959. It was made into a one-hour documentary for KCRA. Among others, Sweet also shot a documentary about the restoration of the State Capitol.

Another project that Sweet is fond of is the documentary he shot with KCRA staffers in Mexico City, documenting President **John F. Kennedy's** signing of the Alliance Pact, in which the U.S. gave \$20 million to Mexico. "That tape is now in the John F. Kennedy Library," Sweet says.

Among the other highlights of Sweet's career include filming the Indianapolis 500 time trials seven years in a row; visiting the private treasury of the former **Shah of Iran**, featuring bowlfuls of cut and uncut diamonds, rubies and emeralds; meeting and interviewing **King Olaf** on his yacht in San Francisco Bay; and meeting stars like **Jayne Mansfield, Johnny Weismuller, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans** and **George Raft**.

At KCRA, Sweet also worked on a show with reporter **Kent Pierce** called *On The Go*. He and other photographers shot stories in 32 counties in northern California, featuring segments on interesting places and people.

Sweet has traveled more than 3 million miles and voyaged to 34 nations throughout his career. He's survived five plane crashes. He's been everywhere including Bermuda, the Mexican Riviera, Vietnam and Afghanistan. He's even been to the North and South Poles and just about everywhere else in between.

While his legacy can be found in everything he has shot during a four-decade-plus career that ended in 1995, Sweet's other passion is also a legacy, too.

One day back in 1961, Sweet walked past a KCRA dumpster and saw a pile of boxes. One was labeled "**Jessie Owens** in Berlin Olympics." As he

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plowed through the pile, he eventually rescued 565 spools of sports highlights, from 1919 to 1956. "Someone upstairs (in management) felt we didn't need them," Sweet recalls.

And so began another career for Sweet — archivist.

This, of course, was happening at a time when many stations around the country were destroying their archives. Some station managers simply felt the old films were of little importance after they aired. "Losing all of these films would have been a disaster," Sweet says.

During his years of working at KCRA and now in his years of retirement, Sweet has meticulously maintained archival film preservation, not only for KCRA but for KQVR as well. You might say it's his pet project. For one man to preserve Sacramento and Northern California TV news broadcasts is an amazing, almost thankless feat. But, Sweet doesn't do it for attention or the occasional pat-on-the-back. As he puts it, it's truly about preserving the past.

All of Sweet's "pretty good stuff" is a record of a vanished California. The Golden State has changed drastically since World War II, and all of that visual history can be found in the archives Sweet created. First, the collection found a home at Sweet's house. The collection, at one point, grew to 400,000 feet of film, spilling over from his garage to every closet in the house. Sweet's wife, **Mauvis**, was always very patient and understanding with Sweet's desire to save old film from being thrown away.

Through it all, Sweet has saved — get this — more than 9 million feet of news film from going to the junkyard.

This is Sweet's passion. Ask him about any particular date in history, and he'll tell you what happened on that day. His mind is still much like an instant Rolodex of facts and figures.

Sweet is a man who took the initiative to preserve the historic record of Sacramento and Northern California. Today, the Harry Sweet Collection, at California State University, Sacramento, has 1,100 miles of news film in their library, donated by Sweet. He has also been maintaining the archives at KCRA and KQVR since his retirement from behind the lens.

"Within the often coarse nature of a newsroom, Harry Sweet was always a gem to be around," says friend and former KCRA anchor **Stan Atkinson**, who worked with Sweet for many years. "A fine eye in the viewfinder with always great results on the film or tape he shot and edited. Energy without end, and always that smile."

(Kevin Wing pens Silver Circle and Gold Circle profiles each month for Off Camera. The two-time Emmy® Award-winning Bay Area television journalist is a news writer at NBC Bay Area/KNTV in San Jose and is a host and producer of travel programs, including "Catch a Wave.")



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bankruptcy court briefs state the station is finally turning a profit again now that it has severely cut costs and is protected from having to pay off its accumulated debt. "Young now anticipates that KRON will make a profit of approximately \$2 million in 2010," the document states, "a projection that is based upon expenses that are already 'a known number' from the restructuring process and projected revenues that are 'rather conservative.'"

However this all shakes out, it appears, once again, past predictions of KRON's demise have been premature.