



Eddie Cantor and the Origin of “The March of Dimes”

by Leland Powels and Marissa Mendenhall

Mr. Eddie Cantor, famous screen-stage-radio comedian, and his new 1933 Lincoln V-12 seven passenger Limousine, photographed on the United Artists lot in Hollywood, California.

Note: The side mount tires are covered in leather covering with stainless steel trim on each edge.

Eddie Cantor (January 31st 1892 - October 10th, 1964) was born Edward Israel Iskowitz and was an American performer, comedian, dancer, singer, actor and songwriter.

Cantor was born in New York City the son of Russian – Jewish Immigrants. His mother died when he was a year old and his father died of pneumonia when he was 2 years old. The exact date of his birth is unknown. He was raised by his grandmother Esther. Esther passed away just before Eddie got signed to his first long –term contract.

Eddie Cantor met his wife Ida in 1913 and married her in 1914. Ida Cantor is credited with creating Eddie’s Stage name from “Izzy”. She did not feel that Izzy was the proper name for an Actor. They had five daughters together. This “Apostle of Pep” was regarded almost as a family member by millions of Americans because his top rated shows revealed intimate stories and amusing anecdotes about his wife Ida and five daughters.

Some of his hits include “Makin’ Whoopee,” “Ida,” “If You Knew Susie,” “Ma! He’s Makin’ Eyes at Me,” “Margie” and “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Patee?)” He also wrote a few songs, including “Merrily We Roll Along,” the *Merrie Melodies* Warner Bros. cartoon theme.

The lyrics go like this...

*My wife is on a diet, she tries to
keep it quiet
Gee but she looks like the Deuce
What used to be her fender, is growing thin
and slender,
Even her bumper is loose.
Round’ her chassis, she’s not the same,*

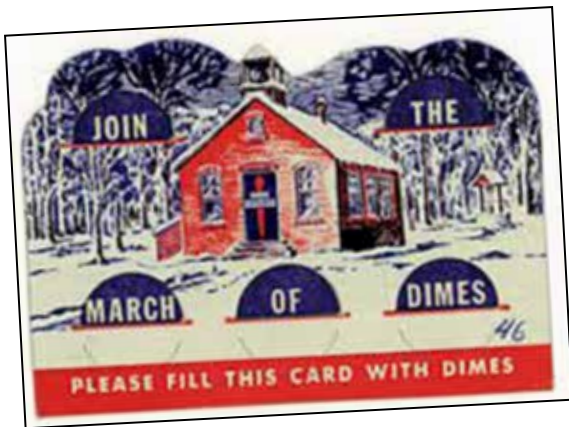
Ida and Eddie Cantor



Eddie Cantor and his wife Ida with their five daughters.



A still of Eddie Cantor in the Movie “Thank Your Lucky Stars” 1943.



March of Dimes, dime holder. Kids would take these door to door to get them filled up and send the dimes in.



FDR in a promotional photo for the March of Dimes. FDR rode in many classic Lincolns.



Marilyn Monroe was one of the many stars that worked hard promoting the March of Dimes in the 1950's.

*Why you can even see the bolts that hold up her frame!
My wife is on a diet, and since she's on a diet,
I never go home anymore!*

Another gag song he did was called, "My Wife is on a Diet" ...in the 1930 short subject Getting a Ticket, featuring a late 20's Rolls Royce Piccadilly Roadster.

Both Ida and Eddie Cantor had a decline in health after the death of their daughter Marjorie at the age of 44. Eddie Cantor passed away of a heart attack in 1964 at the age of 72.

Eddie Cantor was the second President of the Screen Actors Guild serving from 1933 – 1935 and was also honored with an Academy Award the year of his death for distinguished service to the film industry.

Eddie Cantor was also known for his humanitarian work. He is known for coining the phrase and for his help in developing the March of Dimes.

The March of Dimes was created as the donation campaign of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which was organized to combat polio. Polio first started to appear in the late 19th century. By 1910 much of the world experienced a dramatic increase in polio cases. The polio virus went on to become one of the most dreaded childhood diseases in the 20th century leaving thousands of children and adults paralyzed.

Beginning in 1934 Polio was commonly associated with the Annual Birthday Balls that were held every year on January 30th in honor of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday. These fundraising parties were organized just as the country was emerging from the Great Depression.

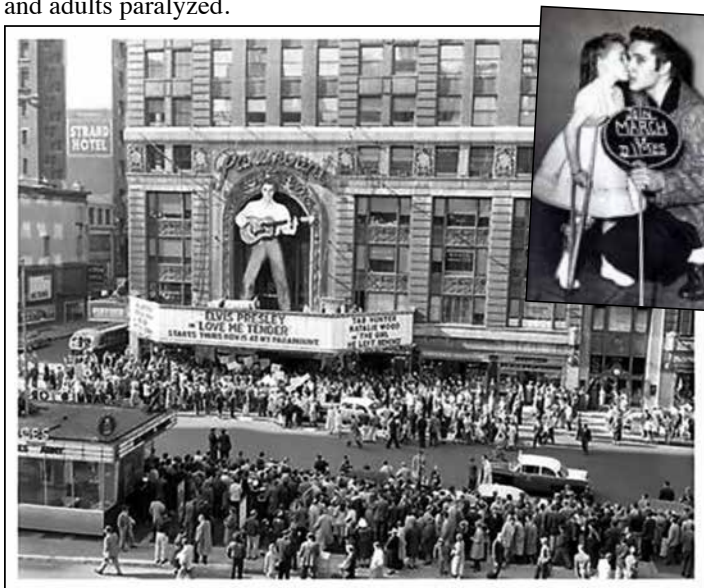
As the economy continued to decline the cases of polio were still rising. Polio was a highly infectious disease that usually hit harder in the summertime.

In 1937 FDR announced the creation of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and it was left to Eddie Cantor and other promoters to push the campaign. Eddie came up with the idea he had one day in the offices on the MGM lot.

I don't think that Eddie Cantor could have ever realized that his catchphrase would have held the historic importance that it did. It became more recognizable than the foundation itself.

During his own radio show in 1938, Cantor made his first campaign by asking his listeners to mail a dime to the nation's most famous assumed polio victim, President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Soon after, the White House mail room was flooded with close to three million dimes. Soon after that, other entertainers joined in their own appeals through their own shows.

One famous supporter of the cause had been known to say, "No one is too poor to give a dime to help a kid walk again."



Elvis got inoculated with the new polio vaccine as part of a public service announcement for The March of Dimes on October 28th, 1956.



From left to right: Earl Carroll, Jack Benny, W.C. Fields, Eddie Cantor and Miss America 1939, Patricia Mary Donnelly Harris.

It was a fundraising gold mine that asked for a small donation from millions instead of large donations from some and it worked. This was the first type of fundraising America had seen of this type and we have seen many campaigns asking for small donations to help fight many causes since.

In 1945, the death of FDR brought about an immediate call for a new dime to be created with his image, since he had been so closely related to the “March of Dimes”. The United States Treasury

then replaced the Mercury Dime that had been being produced since 1916 with the image of the late President.



Horseless carriage dash plaque from 1956 commemorating the March of Dimes cross country tour.



1928 FRANKLIN on the coast to coast march of dimes tour from Baltimore to Laurel. Put on by the Chesapeake Region of the Antique Automobile club of America in the 1950's.



Car Clubs are still active today as seen in this 2012 photo taken in San Diego, California of a March of Dimes fundraising event.

Eddie continued to support the March of Dimes through the 50's and the funds that were raised through his campaign helped to eliminate the scourge of polio from America through the vaccines that were developed in the late 50's and early 60's.

We must conclude that Eddie Cantor was truly an amazing human being as well as an amazing performer.

After the March of Dimes campaign found success in their crusade to eliminate Polio, the foundation changed its mission to birth defects prevention and in 1979 officially changed its corporate name to the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.

Many of the Car Clubs starting in the late 50's also took on the March of Dimes as a cause that was well worth fighting for and donating money to. There are still many car shows put on today that continue to be held for the Foundation. Eddie Cantor truly had a stroke of genius the day he invented his catchy phrase.



(Information taken from Wikipedia, The March of Dimes Foundation website, and IMDB)