

Spanky McFarland

Titles: 109 Sources: 3 Stills: 3

Born: George Robert Phillips McFarland; Fort Worth, Texas; October 2nd 1928†
Died: Grapevine, Texas; June 30th 1933

[† elsewhere given as George Emmett McFarland; born Dallas, Texas, 2nd October 1926]

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"American child actor of the thirties, the fat boy of the **OUR GANG** one-reelers."

Those Endearing Young Charms entry:

"Spanky's first experiences before the camera came while he modelled as the "typical American baby" for advertising posters. The posters represented a brand of bread that was manufactured in Dallas, and his picture so increased the sale of the bread that the baking company decided to make an advertising film with Spanky as the star.

The film proved to be a blessing to Spanky for it brought him under the watchful eye of Hal Roach, producer-director of the **OUR GANG** short features. It was not long before Spanky received some choice roles. He joined the "gang" at the age of three and was its top star throughout the thirties and early forties.

In addition to his many **OUR GANG** roles, Spanky performed in a number of motion pictures: "**THE DAY OF RECKONING**", "**MISS FANE'S BABY IS STOLEN**", "**KENTUCKY KERNELS**", "**O'SHAUGHNESSY'S BOY**", "**HERE COMES THE BAND**", "**THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE**", "**GENERAL SPANKY**", "**PICK A STAR**", "**VARIETY SHOW**", "**PECK'S BAD BOY WITH THE CIRCUS**", "**JOHNNY DOUGHBOY**".

In 1958 Spanky worked for KOTV in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he ran re-runs of the **OUR GANG** comedies. At the same time he occasionally saw fit to undertake personal appearance tours through the Midwestern

states. Spanky held many jobs before his television programme in Tulsa, including gas station attendant, hot-dog vendor and oil promoter."

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"To the cereal-besotted image-makers of **OUR GANG** – "Farina" Hoskins already installed, "Buckwheat" Thomas to come – any chubby child on a bread advertisement must have seemed an offer not to be refused. An 18-month old baby called George Robert Phillips McFarland had been such a hit on a Dallas bakery's posters in 1929 that they proceeded to star him in a cinema commercial. That's how he was spotted by an **OUR GANG** scout, and it didn't take long for the Roach studio to acquire a slice of the action.

Spanky (the name taken from his mother's recurrent threat to the roaming toddler) was rotund, self-contained and intelligent. The Gang director Robert McGowan said of him "He's the first genius I've directed since Jackie Cooper". Certainly he had wonderful comic timing, and was as drily laid back as Stymie Beard. His "okey-dokey" was the essence of good-humoured equanimity.

From "**FREE EATS**" in 1932 to "**UNEXPECTED RICHES**" in 1942, Spanky was a top favourite in the Gang's shorts. He was in 94 altogether, plus his own star vehicle, the full-length feature "**GENERAL SPANKY**", in which he leads a Southern kids' militia against a Union army. The transplantation of the Gang into a historical setting with awkward overtones of real bloodshed didn't work, although Spanky, aided by "Alfalfa" Switzer, "Buckwheat"

Thomas and other Gang stalwarts, is still a formidable little pudding.

He was sometimes featured with the studio's adult comics like Charlie Chase, or loaned out to other studios. (In "**O'SHAUGHNESSY'S BOY**" he played Jackie Cooper as a small child.) I've been unable to discover if a putative 1936 short called "**ALONE, ALAS**" really existed, but the title is too good to lose.

After 1944, no more acting work came his way. When he was old enough Spanky joined the Air Force for a while, then worked at a soft drink factory, briefly hosted a TV show that showed old Gang movies, sold hamburgers and wine (not together), promoted oil, and finally, after one or two other projects, rose to a solid position in the sales department of the Philco-Ford TV. However, he made at least one modest comeback, in "**MOON-RUNNERS**" (75).

Maltin and Bann, interviewing Spanky in 1977, liked him enormously: "a guy without any pretense... a man's man... plucky, talented, pleasantly grumpy." "

FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
32	3	FREE EATS	OUR GANG short
32		- - - OUR GANG shorts x7 - - -	
33	4	FORGOTTEN BABIES	OUR GANG short
33		- - - OUR GANG shorts x5 - - -	
33		DAY OF RECKONING	
34	5	- - - OUR GANG shorts x8 - - -	
34		THE CRACKED ICEMAN	
		with <i>Matthew "Stymie" Beard, Tommy Bond</i>	
34		KENTUCKY KERNELS	
34		MISS FANE'S BABY IS STOLEN	
		with <i>Baby Leroy</i>	
35	6	ANNIVERSARY TROUBLE ☞	OUR GANG short
		with <i>Darla Hood, Mickey Gubitosi</i>	
35		- - - OUR GANG shorts x7 - - -	
35		HERE COMES THE BAND	
35		O'SHAUGHNESSY'S BOY	
		with <i>Jackie Cooper, Wally Allbright</i>	
36	7	- - - OUR GANG shorts x8 - - -	
36		<u>GENERAL SPANKY</u>	in title role
		with <i>Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer, Billy "Buckwheat" Thomas, Rex Downing, Jerry Tucker</i>	
36		THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE	
		with <i>George Ernest</i>	
36		ALONE ALAS	short
37	8	FRAMING YOUTH	OUR GANG short
37		- - - OUR GANG shorts x11 - - -	
37		PICK A STAR	
		with <i>Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer</i>	
37		VARIETY SHOW	
38	9	- - - OUR GANG shorts x8 - - -	
38		<u>PECK'S BAD BOY WITH THE CIRCUS</u>	
		with <i>Tommy Kelly, Mickey Rentschler, Leonard Kibrick</i>	
39	10	- - - OUR GANG shorts x11 - - -	
40	11	- - - OUR GANG shorts x9 - - -	
41	12	<u>WEDDING WORRIES</u> ☞	OUR GANG short
		with <i>Billy "Buckwheat" Thomas, Billy "Froggy" Laughlin, Darla Hood, Mickey Gubitosi</i>	
41		- - - OUR GANG shorts x7 - - -	
42	13	- - - OUR GANG shorts x7 - - -	
42		UNEXPECTED RICHES	OUR GANG short
42		JOHNNY DOUGHBOY	
		with <i>Bobby Breen, Butch & Buddy, Baby Sandy, Harry McKim, Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer</i>	
43	14	I ESCAPED FROM THE GESTAPO	
44	15	THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW	
		with <i>Bobby Blake</i>	

[* In 1985 he made a "special guest appearance" as the Mayor in the truly dismal SF Western "THE AURORA ENCOUNTER"]