

# Edith Lindeman Calisch, critic and lyricist, dies

Edith Lindeman Calisch, entertainment critic of The Times-Dispatch for 31 years and lyricist of the popular songs "Little Things Mean a Lot" and "The Red-Headed Stranger," died Saturday at Stratford Hall Nursing Home in Henrico County.

She was 86 and had lived at 5100 Monument Ave.

Mrs. Calisch, who wrote under her maiden name, was the widow of A. Woolner Calisch.

A native of Pittsburgh, Mrs. Calisch was an alumna of Collegiate School and Barnard College.

She joined the staff of The Times-Dispatch in 1933, serving as a film and theater critic, entertainment writer and amusement editor. She retired in 1964.

In a 1958 retrospective, Mrs. Calisch estimated that by then, she had seen 6,000 films ("give or take a few"), beginning with "Saturday's Millions," which she described as "a football picture with a difference."

During her career, she wrote, "sound films have achieved the ultimate, color has been perfected, 3-D has come and gone, leaving my eyes the worse for wear. Cinerama, Cinema — and other — scopes, Todd-AO and stereophonic sound have been ushered in. Radio became a menace and was overcome. Television has become another menace and is still offering tough competition. . . .

"I've enjoyed most of it, hated a little of it and benefited from all of it," she concluded.

Alf Goodykoontz, executive editor of Richmond Newspapers, said, "Edith Lindeman made a tremendous contribution to the cultural life of this community for many years. She'll be remembered especially for the strong coverage she provided for the area's regional theaters in their formative years."

In collaboration with composer Carl Stutz, Mrs. Calisch wrote several dozen popular songs in the 1950s. Their biggest hit was "Little Things Mean a Lot" which, as recorded by Kitty Kallen, was the top song of 1954.



File photo

## Edith Lindeman Calisch

Saw 6,000 movies

"My father — and later, my husband — went by the philosophy that it's the little things that mean so much," Mrs. Calisch said, explaining the genesis of the song.

"My dad always said, 'When you've got money, spend it and enjoy it. When you don't, you do without it. There are plenty of things to make up for it.'"

"Little Things" has been revived repeatedly by recording artists, most recently in 1978 by country singer Margo Smith.

In 1953, Stutz and Mrs. Calisch wrote "Red-Headed Stranger," a Western ballad originally intended for Perry Como. Because of a publishing dispute, Mrs. Calisch said, the tune never reached Como.

In 1976, "Stranger" became the title song of a best-selling album by country singer Willie Nelson.

"I was just sitting at home one night, playing with the idea of colors," Mrs. Calisch recalled. The redhead she had in mind was her husband. She set the ballad in Blue Rock, Mont., gave the hero a "raging black stal-

lion" — and introduced him to a "yellow-haired lady" riding a bay.

A third Stutz-Lindeman composition, "Blackberry Winter," originally recorded by the late "Sunshine Sue" Workman of WRVA radio's "Old Dominion Barn Dance," became a backdoor million seller in the '50s as the flip side of Mitch Miller's "The Yellow Rose of Texas."

Mrs. Calisch said she took up songwriting while driving through Kentucky with her husband.

"We had the radio on and a lot of music was coming over, and I said, 'Oh, Lord, I could write better lyrics than that.' And my husband, who believed I could do anything I set my mind to, said, 'Well, why don't you?'"

Inspired by the winding roads on that trip, she soon had a first lyric, which she took to Stutz, then an announcer at WRVA.

"We never went any place with the song," Mrs. Calisch recalled. "But I figured if I could write 'Curves in Kentucky,' I could write something a little better."

She was honored by the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1977.

Before joining The Times-Dispatch, Mrs. Calisch wrote several children's books used in Jewish Sabbath schools, including two volumes of "Bible Tales for the Very Young" and "Tales from Grandfather's Big Book," based on Old Testament stories.

Mrs. Calisch was a member of Temple Beth Ahabah.

A funeral is scheduled for 10 a.m. Wednesday at Joseph W. Bliley Funeral Home, Third and Marshall streets. Burial will be in Hebrew Cemetery.

Mrs. Calisch is survived by a son, Elliott W. Calisch of Richmond; two daughters, Frances Rothenberg and Virginia C. Fairman, both of Richmond; and a brother, John B. Lindeman of Leesburg.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the donor's favorite charity.