Actors and Actresses Depicting Famous People: The Weekly News of December 11, 2006, was entitled “Let’s Go to the Movies.” When I was young during the Golden Age of Hollywood, I loved the movies, culminating in the Club House Theater in Yorklyn, which I operated for two seasons in 1947 and 1948.

From the 1930s through the ‘50s, leading stars of the screen were under contract with the big studios and often took roles not to their liking. Among the features during this period was the portrayal of American heroes in full-length films, which carried over to historical documentaries on TV. The earlier movies took liberties with actual facts, but they were popular. Big name stars were often asked to portray historical figures. Sometimes they were honored to do it; often they “had to.” Following is the list of those I can recall.

Spencer Tracy: Clarence Darrow, Father Flanagan, Christopher Jones, Jimmy Doolittle, Thomas Edison, Robert Rogers.
Edward Arnold: Pawnee Bill, Daniel Webster
Walter Hampden: Thomas Jefferson
Hal Holbrook: John Adams, Mark Twain, Abraham Lincoln
Henry Fonda: Abraham Lincoln
James Stewart: Glenn Miller, Charles A. Lindbergh
Cary Grant: Cole Porter
Don Ameche: Alexander Graham Bell, Stephen Foster
James Cagney: George M. Cohan
Gary Cooper: Lou Gehrig, Sergeant York
Joel McCrea: Buffalo Bill Cody
Louis Calhern: Buffalo Bill Cody
Raymond Massey: Abraham Lincoln, John Brown
Robert Walker: Jerome Kern
Jose Ferrer: Sigmund Romberg
Tony Curtis: Harry Houdini
Charlton Heston: Andrew Jackson (twice)
Van Heflin: Andrew Johnson
Ronald Reagan: George Custer, George Gipp
Errol Flynn: Earl of Essex, Gentleman Jim Corbett, Jeb Stuart, George Custer
Howard Keel: Frank Butler
Fess Parker: Swamp Fox Marion, Davy Crockett, James J. Andrews
Ralph Bellamy: Franklin D. Roosevelt
Charles Boyer: Napoleon
Charles Laughton: Captain Bligh
Gene Lockhart: Stephen A. Douglas
James Mason: General Edward Braddock
Victor Mature: Samson
Walter Huston: Abraham Lincoln, Jerry Cohan
John Wayne: Davy Crockett
Richard Widmark: Jim Bowie
Mickey Rooney: Young Tom Edison
Ray Middleton: Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Frank Butler
Clark Gable: Fletcher Christian
Howard Da Silva: Benjamin Franklin, Jack Armstrong
Fredric March: William Jennings Bryan
Yul Brynner: King Solomon
Pat O’Brien: Knute Rockne
Fred Astaire: Vernon Castle
Mario Lanza: Enrico Caruso
Ethel Merman: Annie Oakley, Perle Mesta
Helen Hayes: Queen Victoria, Empress Maria of Russia
Bette Davis: Queen Elizabeth I
Hedy Lamarr: Delilah
Elizabeth Taylor: Cleopatra
Gina Lollobrigida: The Queen of Sheba
Mary Tyler Moore: Mary Todd Lincoln
Ruth Gordon: Mary Lincoln
Patty Duke: Martha Washington
Jaclyn Smith: Sally Fairfax
Ingrid Bergman: Princess Anastasia
Betty Hutton: Annie Oakley

If you need to know who some of these historical people were, or what film they were in, drop me an E-mail.