

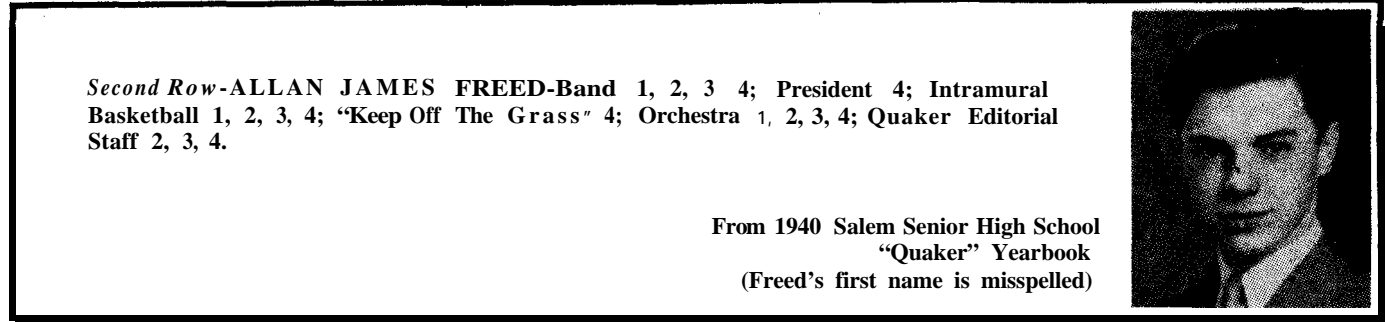
# Salem's Alan Freed Was Rock Music Legend

By JULIE FANSELOW  
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"As a writer, he was responsible for some of the music's first classics. As a concert promoter, he did more to make the music a nationally recognized phenomenon than any other individual. And as a disc jockey, he forcefully expressed the vitality of the music because he allowed it to inspire a new style of radio programming. . . ."  
— Carl Belz, "The Story of Rock," 1969.

"In a sense, he was a victim of the same prejudices and pressures that made rock 'n' roll so bitterly controversial in the '50s. His rise and rapid fall were symptomatic of the vigor and vitality of the Big Beat, also of the tensions, confusions and volatility of a new generation. It was a matter of their sound and the older generation's fury."  
—Arnold Shaw, "The Rockin' '50s," 1974.

"As rock and roll music enters its third decade, perhaps it is about time some of the



Second Row-ALLAN JAMES FREED-Band 1, 2, 3 4; President 4; Intramural Basketball 1, 2, 3, 4; "Keep Off The Grass" 4; Orchestra 1, 2, 3, 4; Quaker Editorial Staff 2, 3, 4.

From 1940 Salem Senior High School  
"Quaker" Yearbook  
(Freed's first name is misspelled)

followers of rock music learned what a profound effect the small town of Salem has had on this multi-million-dollar-& year business." — Area rock fan and historian J.J. Brinker of Homeworth in a letter to the editor of The Salem News, 1974.

Alan Freed was a 1940 graduate of Salem Senior High School, where he was trombone-playing president of the band, a member of the golf club and a lead actor in school dramas such as "Keep Off the Grass."

Jeff Rutledge lives in Johnstown, Pa., where Freed was born and lived with his family until

they moved to Salem when Freed was 3. Rutledge, a concert promoter in central Pennsylvania, has been working nearly two years on a biography of Freed, but the people in Johnstown don't seem to care, he says.

"They very much pride themselves on people who are famous from Johnstown, and they don't even know who Alan Freed is."

In Salem, the situation seems much the same. Fred Flory, longtime local musician and leader of the group Joint Effort says, "You can ask 90 percent of the people in this town and they haven't heard of Alan Freed. Nobody

really cared that much."

But there are other opinions. Members of the Salem-based Big Blue band, for example, believe Freed had an impact on, if nothing else, the spirit of rock 'n' roll in Salem. The Class of 1940 had three reunions before Freed's death in 1965 at age 43, according to Rutledge, and the city's infamous son attended none of them. Big Blue's Randy Strader, who claims Freed as a distant cousin of his mother's, says Freed resented his hometown's rejection of him and the music to which he gave his life.

Whatever Freed's impact, there's little deny-

ing Salem has, in the years since his heyday, become a city that likes its rock 'n' roll. No one from Salem since Freed has made it to the really big time, but the music gets made, in the bars where people perhaps use it primarily as a backdrop, and more importantly, 'in the homes and apartments of people who study or work by day but whose first love and lease on life come from just having friends over to jam.

Although Freed first used the blues-derived "rock 'n' roll" moniker on liner notes to his "Alan Freed's Top 15" album in 1951 (apparently compiled when he was rising to national



attention with his "Moondog Show" on WJW in Cleveland), it was by most accounts another 10 years before the genre caught on in Salem. Brinker wrote of the uncordial reception Freed — by then the nation's most famous disc jockey — and Paramount Pictures executives received in 1956 when they scouted Salem as a possible location for "Don't Knock the Rock."

two years in Virginia before returning in 1964. He hooked up with former classmate Denny Wright, who had been a member of what was probably the area's first rock band, the Rumbletones, formed in 1960, and started the band that later became known as Joint Effort.

The area's second band was formed shortly after The Rumbletones, according to . . .  
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