

*The Old Time Radio Club*

Established 1975

# THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

Number 204

September 1993

*Wicky wacky Swan diddle doo—  
Look what's coming on the radio-oo!  
Look who's on the way for Swan ..  
The pure new floatie you dote on!*



(1941)

**GRACIE ALLEN  
GEORGE BURNS  
PAUL WHITEMAN**

*in*

**"WELL, I SWAN!"**

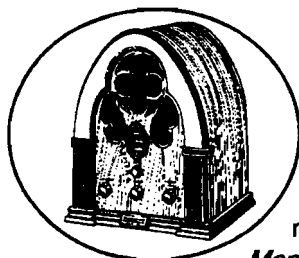
That darling of dumbelles, Gracie Allen, goes on the air soon for SWAN SOAP ... with George Burns and Paul Whiteman ... in a music-mad revel the like of which you never heard!

**COMING WEEK AFTER NEXT!**

**The Old Time Radio Club**

**Club Officers and Librarians**

**Membership Information**



New member processing, \$5.00 plus club membership of \$17.50 per year from Jan 1 to Dec 31. Members receive a tape listing, newsletter, and the yearly *Memories Magazine*. Memberships

are as follows: If you join Jan-Mar, \$17.50; Apr-Jun, \$14.00; Jul-Sep, \$10.00; Oct-Dec, \$7.00. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The Old Time Radio Club meets the first Monday of every month at 7:30 P.M. during the months of September to June at 393 George Urban Blvd. Cheektowaga, N.Y. 14225. The club meets informally during the months of July and August at the same address. Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome.

**Club Mailing Address**

Old Time Radio Club  
P.O. Box 426  
Lancaster, N. Y. 14086

The Old Time Radio Club is affiliated with The Old Time Radio Network.

Back issues of our publications are available as follows:  
The *Illustrated Press* and *Memories* are \$1.50 postpaid. Publications out off print may be borrowed from our Reference Library.

**Deadline for *The Illustrated Press* is the 1st of each month prior to publication.**

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Send all articles, letters, exchange newsletters, etc. to:  
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Tape Library Rates: All reels and video cassettes are \$1.85 per month; audio cassettes and records are \$0.85 per month. Rates include postage and handling. Canadian rates are the same as above, but in Canadian funds.

**Reference Library**

Ed Wanat Sr.  
392 George Urban Blvd.  
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## Born in Buffalo: Bobby Benson

by Jack French

The cowboy kid, who rode to radio fame on his ranch in the Big Bend Country of Texas, was actually "born and raised" in Buffalo, NY. I've been fortunate to piece together this fascinating story with the enthusiastic cooperation of Clive Rice, radio's last, and television's only, Bobby Benson.

Clive didn't get to the B-Bar-B microphone on Mutual until the spring of 1951, but his uncle, Herbert Colin Rice, had created the show for the Buffalo Broadcasting Company, in the early 1930's. Clive has been very kind to share with me his recollections, and those of his relatives, in order to provide the specifics of the true origin of the Bobby Benson radio show.

Herbert Rice was born on August 7, 1904 in Guilford, England, immigrated to Nova Scotia at the age of 19, and a year later entered the United States. The young lad did a variety of construction and painting jobs before discovering the world of entertainment, acting in summer stock on Cape Cod. He gained a little more experience and about 1928, Rice ("Bert" to his English relatives, "Herb" to his American associates) strode into the 5th Avenue studios of NBC in Manhattan and was permitted to audition for an announcer spot.

NBC was impressed with Rice but had no vacancies; they instructed him to go to Buffalo New York and try his hand there. Rice scraped up the train fare, arrived in Buffalo and walked into the Rand Building. At that time it housed the Buffalo Broadcasting Company (Herb referred to it as the "American BBC") which was a conglomerate of four stations under one roof: WGR, WKBW, WKEN, and WMAK.

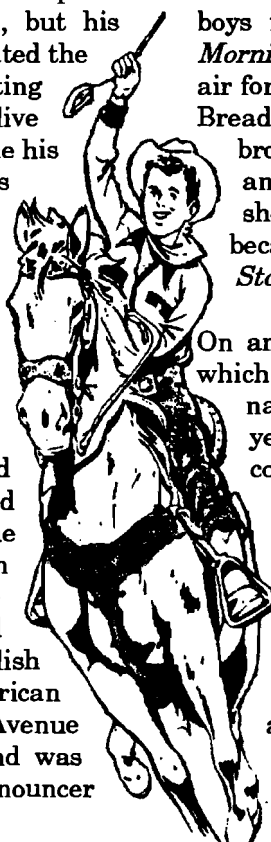
To his delight, Rice was hired (at a starting salary of \$22.50 a week) and for the next 14 years he worked his way up the Buffalo radio ladder, mastering each job in turn. He did everything: write copy, sell advertising, located talent, and work behind the microphone.

Herb's forte was creating shows and discovering new talent. He rounded up the leading choir boys from Buffalo churches, named them the *Morning Boy Choristers*, and kept them on the air for five years under the sponsorship of Lang's Bread. Rice was the first one to pair an ex-stock broker, F. Chase Taylor, and his staff announcer, Budd Hulick, at an open mike show Herb called *Ask for Mail*. The duo later became the CBS network hit, *Colonel Stoopnagle and Budd*.

On another creation, *The Boys Club of the Air* which he packed with juvenile musicians, a lady named Emma Schmidt brought in her 11 year old son. The boy, a skilled pianist, could also play the drums. Rice nurtured the youngster's talent and years later was delighted when the boy grew to be "Buffalo Bob" on the *Howdy Doody* program.

In the 1930's, the Hecker H-O Company of Buffalo, hurting in sales, found itself in need of some new advertising and they asked if Rice could come up with a radio show to boost their cereal. This grain company processed and distributed Presto Cake Flour, H-O Oats, and Cream Farina.

In those days, Western New York State had plenty of grain processing firms. Nabisco Shredded Wheat had (and still has) their major plant at Niagara Falls. Another local company in the Root Building in Buffalo sold "Toasted Whole Wheat Muffets" (which looked like round Shredded Wheat) although their plant was in Depew, New York.



Rice examined the box of H-O Oats in his lap; the H-O looked to him like a cattle brand so that signified cowboys and Indians. For a British citizen who had never been west of Chicago in his life, Herb seemed an unlikely candidate to create a popular western program. But he did! He formed the story line, invented the characters, wrote the script, produced the show, and even played the Chinese cook in his new *Bobby Benson* radio series.

The origin date is unclear and how long before the show made it from local status to network is uncertain. But by October 1932 it was being aired coast to coast from a CBS affiliate studio in Buffalo. Richard Wanamaker, the young son of a Buffalo attorney, was the first voice of the Cowboy Kid. And the radio actress who played "Aunt Lilly" on the program, Lorraine Pankow, was also from Buffalo. She became Herb's first wife.

By any measurable standard, the *Bobby Benson* show was a huge success. H-O Oats was selling "like hot cakes" and the Hecker Company had over a dozen employees working full time responding to the mail requests for the radio premiums the show generated.

I haven't established when the production was moved to New York City; it would probably be about late 1934 or early 1935. Billy Halop (later of "Dead End Kids" fame) became the new voice of Bobby Benson and his sister, Florence, played Polly Armstead on the program. Herb apparently retained control over the show even though he remained in Buffalo. He did not leave the "American BBC" and his adoptive home town until the FCC ordered the break-up of Buffalo's four stations under one roof. This would have been about 1943.

With the break-up, Herb's duties were diminished so he left for Manhattan and joined NBC as an executive there. His original *Bobby Benson* show had been cancelled by CBS in December of 1936, but Herb never forgot it. In 1949 he resurrected the show as a sustainer on

the Mutual Network. Of course, the name of Bobby's ranch could no longer be the H-Bar-O, so Herb changed it to the B-Bar-B.

Herbert Colin Rice died in the spring of 1991. He was 86 years old and had successfully worked over a half-century in all phases of radio broadcasting, including owning and managing radio stations in Idaho and Connecticut. But first, and perhaps foremost, he was the broadcaster from Buffalo, New York who gave us Bobby Benson.

Author's Note: My research continues on the *Bobby Benson* radio program. I would appreciate hearing from any OTR buffs who can provide me with additional data on the Cowboy Kid. My address is 5137 Richardson Drive, Fairfax, VA 22032, or if you prefer to telephone me, it's (703) 978-1236.

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**JACK BENNY**  
ON THE  
**HALLMARK**  
**PLAYHOUSE**  
TONIGHT  
**WIBX 10:00 P.M.**

brought to you by the makers  
of Hallmark Greeting Cards [1948]

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*Etiquette* by Ed "Archie" Gardner

- In the event mine hostess says, "Please pass the nutcracker," it is bad form to hand her a beer bottle.
- When doing the town with a dame always walk on the outside unless the curb is on the inside. On making a left turn the switch is affected by going around her outside - or counter-clockwise. (This rule may be violated if the lady happens to be carrying the gentlemen's coat)

## **The End of a Great Radio Institution**

by Andy Blatt

On December 10, 1992, WNEW Radio ceased to exist. On the air for 58 years, the station, with a declining audience and advertising revenues, was sold to a financial company and within five weeks it was an all-business news station. You may wonder what significance this station has, considering the changes in format and management (and ownership) of such institutions as KIF in Los Angeles, WNBC in New York (formerly WRCA and WEAF) and others. WNEW was the place for a lot of firsts: the first place that records (music and band remote transcriptions) were aired on a regular basis, first regularly scheduled newscasts and the first recorded use of the term "disk jockey," although WINS in New York (and air personality Alan Freed) used the term as well. It was also at WNEW that air personality William B. Williams coined the description of Frank Sinatra "Chairman of the Board."

"The Make Believe Ballroom" was the station's first attempt at using recorded music interspersed with commentary and some live broadcasts; this began in 1935 with Martin Block as the host. On May 6, 1937 while maneuvering to land at Lakehurst, New Jersey the giant zeppelin the Hindenburg crashed and the ship's hydrogen propellant caught fire. WNEW sent reported Herb Morrison to the scene to report on the tragedy. In the meantime, the station had to keep the lines of communications open to the scene, so it was decided to broadcast recorded music in between news reports. Subsequently, it was revealed that thirty-five passengers and crew perished in the accident, along with one ground crew member. The report from Herb Morrison is the only audio record of the accident. It has now become one of the best known news reports, as Mr. Morrison is heard sobbing, "oh, the humanity." The regularly scheduled news reports were well received with virtually everyone tuned in to at least part of the broadcast.

It was decided at that time in 1937 to schedule

regular music and news. This was acknowledged to have such an impact that on October 30, 1938 transcriptions of Morrison's report were received in preparing Mercury Theater's infamous "War of the Worlds" broadcast. Frank Readick who played Carl Phillips, newsman in the field at Grover's Mill reviewed the transcriptions in order to establish a realistic approach.

All this history was not lost on the public, however. When the station was on the verge of being sold to Salem Communications, a religious broadcaster, several public officials intervened, including New York's Governor Cuomo. As it faded, WNEW (rumored to be named after Ed Wynn, an early personality on the station and part owner) did not lose its allies. Another station emerged to take its place. The New York Times Company, owner of WQXR-AM which duplicated the programming on its FM station, finally originated separate programming for the first time since WQXR-FM signed on in the 1950's. The new WQXR wanted no part of the new owners of the old WNEW frequency, they wouldn't buy the call letters, (at a reported cost of one million dollars) they wouldn't part with any money for the vast record library and they carefully and gradually hired most of the major air personalities who formerly worked the WNEW microphones. The "new home of American popular standards" showed a profit for its first full three months on the air and the rating tripled, while 1130 AM's new call letters WBBR and format, all business, wielded nothing, no perceptible rating (you need at least a 0.1 rating to show up in the quarterly rating report). The new owners are spending a lot of promotional money. The most ironic thing of all, WQXR-AM almost switched to a business format last year! Generally, nostalgia/big-band/popular music stations do well in cities where they are located. But usually the audience is older and they must be located in bigger cities. Usually there is only enough advertising revenue and audience for one of these stations in a city or market. In Philadelphia, big-band WIP switched to an all sports format, but WPEN, the most successful nostalgia/big-band station in the country plays on.


### OTR Interview

Through the medium of imagination, we here at the *Illustrated Press* have been able to interview a few radio personalities from the golden past. Our first interview is with Lowell Thomas, newscaster. Mr. Thomas was born in 1892 in Ohio, was reared in a Colorado mining camp and as a youth punched cattle. He attended four universities and is a well known author. His voice is heard on radio, on Fox Movietone News and Cinerama. The question is ours, the answer is Lowell Thomas' from 1954.

IP: Mr. Thomas, would you tell us a little of your radio history and philosophy.

Thomas: The first radio broadcast I ever made was a news broadcast, over KDKA, in Pittsburgh, in March, 1925. Its news, strictly speaking, could have been told in one phrase: man had circumnavigated the globe by air. Instead I devoted a solid hour to the story of the First World Flight, of which I had been the historian, and still didn't feel I had given that great news story all it deserved. So you see, what's news is largely a matter of interpretation. I have always thought that a program like my CBS Radio news series should interpret the world "news" in the broadest way. Its scope should not be limited to the important events, to big time politics, to top headline stories. I do try to cover the major topics in an impartial way. But I also believe that the lesser doings of mankind, when they're out of the ordinary, can be a proper part of a radio news program. The oddities and singularities of the human race, day by day, are part of the ever moving picture of mankind living its life, full of tragedy, comedy, twists, and surprises. After all, the term "news" might be refined as an account of mankind going about the business of living. It could include anything that illustrates the mundane scene in a significant way. The inclusion of the lighter side, the colorful side, provides entertainment, of course, but I like to think it's also part of the fabric of current history. When you come down, to it, who dwells on an entertaining story, as well as

a grand event, more than Herodotus, the Father of History? There's plenty of such respectable precedent for anyone who prefers to go beyond the stentorian bulletins in dealing with the wondrous variety of news that is the raw material of history.



**SPOTLIGHT TONIGHT!**

**This Is Laugh Week--  
Nation's No. 1 Comics  
Go All-Out . . . Tonight!**

**7:00—Ersel Twing, Supper Club**  
**8:00—Milton (Buffalo-Bound) Berle**  
**8:30—Teen Fun—A Date With Judy**  
**9:00—Barber Trouble—Amos 'n' Andy**  
**9:30—Vista's Best Driver? Fibber?**  
**10:00—Eddie Cantor With Bob Hope**  
**10:30—Red Skelton Crowned Laugh-Kid**  
**11:15—Joe Wesp in Local-Laugh Slant**

**TOMORROW MORNING HITS**

**9:15—It's Circus Time! Col. Morton of Shrine Visits "Early Date"**  
**12:30—Harold Russell, Soldier-Hero of Films, Visits Luncheon Club**

**WARING! MORNING TREAT AT 11**

*From the Editor's Chair*

I'm sure that everyone enjoyed the fine article on Bobby Benson by Jack French. Jack could have published the article in his own *Radio Recall*, the Newsletter of the Metro Washington OTR Club. But do the fact that Bobby's "roots" were in Buffalo, NY, and as Jack put it, "in the spirit of OTR cooperation" he allowed it to be printed first in the IP. Our hobby sure could use more people with Jack's attitude. Thanks again, Jack.



Two of our members, Frank Boncore and Dick Olday are hosts of an OTR show on cable radio. Locally, they are on the audio side of WKBW-TV, channel 7 and WUTV-TV, channel 29. If you have a stereo TV set you can hear them every Sunday night from 9:00 to 10:00 and on holidays from 10:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M. on the Niagara Frontier Radio Ready Service.

Received some very positive feedback on the new format for the IP. and encouraging words from a number of members, so far so good. And on the subject of feedback, I would like to extend a very special thank you to member Mike Sommer of San Francisco, for all the support he has given me and the IP during the past year.

Remember, if you have any OTR news, articles, ads, etc., send them or a copy to the IP to be used in future issues.


Additions to the Cassette Tape Library

- 1804 FRED ALLEN - W/HENRY MORGAN - 5/2/48  
FRED ALLEN - W/DON MCNEIL - 5/9/48
- 1805 FRED ALLEN - W/GEORGE JESSEL - 11/29/48  
FRED ALLEN - W/LEO DUROCHER - 4/25/48
- 1806 FRED ALLEN - W/JOE COOPER - 3/22/39  
FRED ALLEN - CONCLUSION
- 1807 FRED ALLEN - ST. PAT'S DAY - 3/17/37  
FRED ALLEN - CONCLUSION
- 1808 ARCHIE ANDREWS - RED CROSS PARTY - 3/15/47  
ARCHIE ANDREWS - TAKING A BATH - 8/9/47


- 1809 ARCHIE ANDREWS - GOING TO BED EARLY - 11/13/47  
ARCHIE ANDREWS - CHRISTMAS SHOPPING - 12/13/47
- 1810 ARCHIE ANDREWS - LOCKED OUT OF HOUSE - 11/6/48  
ARCHIE ANDREWS - RELATIVES VISIT - 11/20/48
- 1811 TOP SECRET - THE DOCUMENT - 10/6/50  
TOP SECRET - DREAM THAT MEANT DEATH - 10/10/50
- 1812 TOP SECRET - ADMIRAL'S STRANGE IDENTITY - 6/19/50  
TOP SECRET - (TITLE NOT KNOWN) - 6/23/50
- 1813 THE CHASE - JAILBREAK - 2/22/53  
THE CHASE - LADY IS A CORPSE - 3/15/53
- 1814 CASEY CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER - SWITCHED PLATES - 7/7/43  
CASEY CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER - CLUE IN CLOUDS - ?/?/45
- 1815 THE SEALED BOOK - DEATH SPINS A WEB  
THE SEALED BOOK - DEVIL ISLAND - ?/?/46
- 1816 THE SEALED BOOK - ESCAPE BY DEATH  
THE SEALED BOOK - DEATH A STORM HOUSE - ?/?/46

**SEE AND HEAR AN ACTUAL  
RADIO BROADCAST**  
OVER RADIO STATION WIBX  
BY REMOTE CONTROL DIRECT FROM THE  
**AVON THEATER STAGE**  
PLUS 2 BIG SCREEN HITS  
**TONIGHT AT 7:30 P. M.**  
Come Before 6 for 25c—Children 10c

**"MARKSON'S RADIO  
TALENT QUEST"**



Featuring  
Utica's Own Entertainers  
PLUS  
**ARNOLD STOLTZ, M. C.**  
AND  
**HARRY J. McCORMICK**  
AT THE AVON ORGAN



**SPONSORED BY**

**MARKSON'S**

**FURNITURE STORE**

644 BLEECKER STREET

1939



**RADIO'S  
GREATEST KID SHOW!  
H-BAR-O RANGERS**

**return to the air  
TONIGHT!**

*presented by*

**FORCE and H-O Oats**

Boys! Girls! Here's the greatest, grandest, most exciting show of the thrilling wild West ever presented over radio.

Here's your old friend, Bobby Benson, back on the air in a series of H-Bar-O RANGERS—bigger and better even than last year. And that famous character, Sunny Jim, co-stars in the cast!

Tune in the first episode of this stupendous show tonight and get the thrill of your life. Plenty of

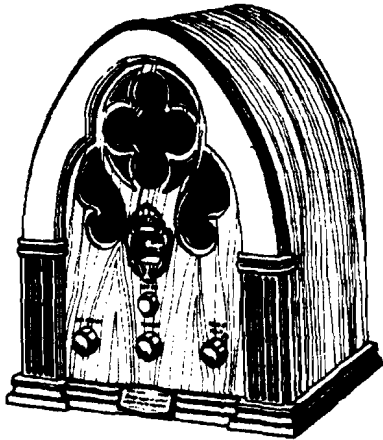
riding, fighting—cowboy songs and stories—Indians, Mexicans and desperate Outlaws.

**Tune in every night!**

Ride, fight, live with these heroes of the wild western plains and mountains every day, Monday through Friday, of every week.

Here's the time: 6:15 P. M., Eastern Daylight Saving Time. Here's the station: WFBI, and the Columbia Network. Tune in! Yip-e-dee! Let's go!

*Old Time Radio Club  
Box 426  
Lancaster, NY 14086*



**First Class Mail**